

risk reporter

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Preventing slips and falls in your place of worship

Slips and falls rank close to the top as the leading cause of unintentional injury and death in the United States. In fact, the most current National Safety Council report identifies slips and falls as the cause of death for 14,500 people with adults over the age of 65 accounting for nearly 80 percent of those deaths.

Slips and falls occur regularly at worship centers across the country and follow the national trend of adults over the age of 65 accounting for the majority of those injured or killed. Preventing slips and falls is a serious issue for all worship centers and a concern that should be addressed for employees, members and guests of all ages and abilities.

Mark Helstein, director of facilities and property for Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., takes a two-prong approach to slip and fall prevention.

“Our main concern is the safety of our members, but we also have to think about protecting our church from the liability of slips and falls,” Helstein said. “This approach helps us to proactively identify potential slip and fall hazards and address them immediately.”

The following guidelines play an important role in developing a comprehensive slip and fall prevention program.

Good housekeeping

According to Rich Peterson, operations manager for Ridgedale Shopping Center in Minnetonka, Minn., slip and fall prevention begins with good housekeeping practices.

“Develop written protocol that addresses floor-cleaning procedures and proper response to housekeeping emergencies such as spills,” Peterson said.

Determine an appropriate floor-cleaning schedule that identifies who is responsible for cleaning and the time of day cleaning should occur.

“We try to conduct a majority of our floor cleaning during off-peak times, such as evenings, to reduce the risk for slips and falls,” Helstein said.

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(preventing slips)

Address any spills of wet and dry substances immediately. “As soon as a spill is reported, we dispatch someone to the scene immediately to display hazard signs and serve as a verbal warning of the danger,” Peterson said. “The spill is cleaned up as soon as possible.”

Remove any cables or extension cords that cross walkways and keep the floor clean of clutter and debris. Close all low drawers immediately to prevent tripping.

Risk areas and routine maintenance

Routine maintenance is required to keep your facilities as well as the grounds free from potential slip, trip and fall hazards. The following risk areas should be addressed as part of a routine maintenance schedule:

- *Sidewalks, curbs and walkways* — Seasonal changes in temperature along with regular wear and tear can deteriorate the condition of outdoor sidewalks, curbs and walkways, so these areas should be inspected regularly.

“Concrete, cobblestone and brick walkways and curbs often settle over time, leaving a dangerous lip, crumbling or uneven area,” said Linda Pitts, facility manager at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, Va. “It is generally best to contact a professional to level out or build up uneven areas. However, in the meantime, these hazards should be identified with colored paint or a warning sign.”

In addition, keep sidewalks and outdoor walkways clear of unexpected obstacles such as roots, rocks and acorns.

- *Carpeted floors* — Carpeting and nonskid mats offer inherent slip-resistant qualities but should be checked regularly for frays, tears, loose or curling edges and bumps. All mats should be securely fixed to the floor.
- *Handicap entrances and exits* — All handicap entrances and exits should be clearly marked with appropriate signage.

“We also mark handicap ramps with colored paint and install handrails along the ramps wherever possible,” Pitts said.
- *Tile, wood and linoleum floors* — Smooth surfaces, such as tile and linoleum, require constant maintenance to prevent slips and falls. Floors should be kept clean and free of water, oil and grease. This is especially important in kitchens and cafeterias. Tiled or concrete floors may be etched to provide a rougher, more skid-free surface. Smooth floors also can be covered with skid-resistant mats.
- *Stairwells and steps* — Stairwells and steps should be well lit with sturdy handrails on both sides when possible. All steps should have the same rise and depth with visible edges and should not be dangerously

steep. Keep stairs and stairwells free of grease, snow, ice, boxes and other obstacles that could cause slips and trips.

“Stairs present the greatest risk of slips and falls at our facility,” Peterson said. “We put a skid-free surface on the edge of many indoor steps and mark outdoor steps with brightly colored paint.”

- *Lighting* — Adequate indoor and outdoor lighting is crucial to slip and fall prevention. Outdoor stairs, walkways and parking lots should be well lit.

“Remember to adjust outdoor lighting as the seasons change and as it gets dark earlier and stays dark longer,” Helstein said.

Conduct regular lighting inspections of your facility and replace burnt-out bulbs immediately.

“Adequate lighting is especially important for stairwells,” Pitts said. “We use the highest recommended wattage bulbs in all stairwells.”

Seasonal hazards

Snow, ice and rain all present seasonal slip and fall hazards. Pitts recommends preparedness when it comes to dealing with seasonal risks.

“Evaluate your equipment and employee needs before each season begins,” Pitts said. “For example, stock up on shovels and salt prior to the winter season and devise a team of volunteers or employees to handle snow and ice emergencies.”

- *Snow and ice* — Clear snow and ice from walkways, parking lots, emergency exits and outdoor staircases as soon as possible.

“Our general rule for snow removal is one-half inch on sidewalks and two inches on the parking lots,” Peterson said. “We also pretreat areas for snow and ice with a chemical liquid that prevents buildup on concrete.”

- *Rain* — Keep floors dry and alert people to potentially slippery surfaces in the event of rain.

“Place ‘Caution’ signs in any potentially slick areas when rain begins,” Pitts said. “Entryways and hallways generally become slippery when wet but also consider potentially dangerous outdoor areas such as downspouts and ramps. Preplanning and vigilance can help prevent a majority of slips and falls.”

- **For more information** on slip and fall prevention, visit the National Safety Council Web site at www.nsc.org. Church Mutual Insurance Company also offers free safety videos, *Improving Safety at Your Worship Center* and *Preventing Workplace Injuries is No Accident*, available at www.churchmutual.com; click on “Safety Resources.”



Managing Your Risks

Hazards are everywhere

There is a certain level of risk associated with everything one does in their everyday lives. For example, at every service, your members and guests travel to your worship center and walk in and out of your facility. Being in an automobile accident or tripping and falling are real hazards. The simple act of changing a light bulb can require the use of a ladder and the potential for falling.

There are three strategies you can use when faced with hazards:

- Avoid the risk by stopping the activity
- Reduce the risk by changing the activity
- Accept the risk and continue the activity with no changes

Which strategy you select should be based on the level of the hazard, the activity and your options for that activity.

A pastor in Texas was recently electrocuted when he decided to use a corded microphone while performing a baptism in waist-high water. Although allowing the entire congregation present to hear what was being said is important, avoiding the use of a microphone or using a safer type of microphone should be a must in this situation.

If you require a microphone, the best option is to use a cordless model. Most operate on a 9-volt or other small battery, and the transmitters can be worn safely inside the rubber waders used in the baptistry.

If you must use a hard-wired microphone, it should be suspended from the ceiling and never handled by anyone in the baptistry.

- **For more information** on this topic, as well as many more, go to the Church Mutual Web site, www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources" and select "Risk Alert."

Richard J. Schaber, CPCU
Risk Control Manager



seasonal spotlight

Space heater safety

With the winter season upon us, many congregations turn to space heaters to take the chill out of the air. Portable space heaters are an effective way to provide supplemental heat for worship centers, but with improper use, space heaters are also the leading cause of wintertime fires.

According to Bill Klimek, sales manager at Wizard Electric, Inc. in Chicago, Ill., space heaters have seen dramatic improvements in recent years.

However, Klimek stresses that special care is required to safely operate a space heater. He recommends keeping the area surrounding the space heater clear of fabrics and debris.

"There should never be anything in front of or on top of a space heater, and the heater should be operated on a level surface to prevent tipping. In addition, space heaters should be professionally cleaned and checked every year to ensure they are working properly."

Other safety tips include:

- Purchase a heater with a guard around the heating element to protect flammables from the hot element
- Prior to use, read and follow the instructions for its operation and maintenance
- Do not leave the heater unattended
- To prevent electrical shocks, always keep your heater away from water

"Extension cords should never be used with a space heater, according to fire codes," Klimek said. "Plug the heater directly into the outlet to ensure a clean and safe electrical connection."

Space heaters also affect your energy bill. Using an electric space heater for up to 10 hours a day can cost more than \$1 per day.

With appropriate use and safety precautions, you can keep your worship center warm during the winter months with a space heater.



qa

A Perspective

Much like a vocal musician, every pipe organ possesses a unique all-natural sound that cannot be replicated. Pipe organs also have an unequivocal tonal quality and aesthetic beauty that set them apart from other musical instruments. In order to keep your pipe organ performing in top condition, regular maintenance is required.

The Risk Reporter talked with John Nordlie, founder and president of the J.F. Nordlie Company, a world-renowned organ builder located in Sioux Falls,



S.D., about pipe organ maintenance. John Nordlie studied with respected organ builder A. Eugene Doult.

Nordlie also studied organs abroad in Holland, Germany and Denmark. He apprenticed with master organ builder Fritz Noack in Georgetown, Mass.

In 1976, Nordlie started his company. Since its beginning, the company has built more than 44 pipe organs ranging in size from small, one-manual practice organs to large, three-manual, 53-rank organs.

Risk Reporter: How often should you perform professional maintenance on your pipe organ?

J.F. Nordlie: You should tune your instrument twice a year. Pipe organs are affected by heating cycles. The wood in the organ contracts when the heat turns on during the fall and winter months and expands when the air conditioning comes on during the spring and summer months. I recommend a professional maintenance call right before Christmas and Easter. Musically, these are probably the two most important holidays for the church, and you'll want to make sure your organ is at its best.

Risk Reporter: What type of regular cleaning can be performed by the organization?

J.F. Nordlie: Let the pipes warm up several hours before use and tune them at the temperature at which they will most often be used. Most importantly, keep the chambers clear. Don't use them for storage. I visited one church where someone set hymnals on the bellows (also called the reservoirs). This seriously affected the tonal quality of the pipes, and we had to do some major work to get the organ up and running again. Also, don't run speaker wires into the chamber. If you have to do any kind of electrical work, you should have an organ builder present — even if it's just to move things for the electrician.

Risk Reporter: What is the life span of a pipe organ?

J.F. Nordlie: Generally speaking, it's 40 to 50 years before a major rebuild has to be done, but with regular maintenance, I've seen many pipe organs last 70 to 75 years.

Risk Reporter: How much does a service visit cost?

J.F. Nordlie: It really varies depending on the size of the instrument. For a small instrument, it could cost as little as \$100, and for a large instrument, it could run up to \$1,500 or more. Organizations spend a lot of money on these instruments; a \$1 million investment for a pipe organ is not uncommon. Biannual professional maintenance calls are critical and can catch small problems before they become big ones.

- **For more information** on pipe organs, please visit www.jfnordlie.com or contact John Nordlie at (800) 456-0834.