

## Gravity, blame and inappropriate responses

Submitted by Kellie Mundell on Mon, 2016-04-25 12:02

**Since nearly all slips and falls are avoidable, this is an area where individual blame often attaches and best practice is easily ignored. This isn't ideal, as statistics show that slips, trips and falls remain "public enemy number one" in terms of workplace injuries.**



Any knee jerk response can lead to a failure to respect the safety hierarchy and design out the risk. The HSE's Health and Safety Laboratory gives an excellent example of a fatality at a nightclub which was investigated in depth only because there was suspicion that the chap who died had been pushed down the steps by bouncers.

From the off it was apparent that these steep steps were hazardous. They were badly lit, with "handrails" flush to the wall (so for decoration only) and steps of varying height. The club's accident book (of course) showed that falls and injuries were frequent and that this wasn't

even the first fatality!

A more common trip example: metal escalators have a slat design that merely mirrors the original wooden versions but reduces the contact between the step surface and the users' shoe soles and is visually confusing, especially when stepping off. (You may have noticed that getting off an escalator is harder visually than getting on.)

Surely, "it's what people expect" should take second place to the safest design?

Given the data, we should crowd the halls when an expert in this field stands up to talk risks and solutions, yet instead we snigger "you've got a doctorate in slips trips and falls? Ha!" (Which reminds me of a conversation with an attractive new housemate many years ago. "You're studying the eating habits of snails for your doctorate? Let me help you with that lettuce! No need to thank me." She just looked at me and said, utterly unamused, "you're really not the first person to make that joke".)

The point is that if I'd simply asked in the spirit of curiosity "why?" I would have learned something – and probably made a better impression!

**Challenge:** *How many of us have trained a team and then sent them out to assess risks armed with the slips, trips and falls hierarchy of design out the risk, avoid contamination where possible, clean (where contamination occurs), and provide footwear? How many of us start with footwear ?*

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