

Lubricants aren't the only cause of "slip and fall" injuries in the workplace. Any item that isn't kept in its proper place—especially in high-traffic areas—can be the culprit. Stow it and you might avoid an accident.

A topic I would like to discuss with you this month involves eliminating "slip and fall" injuries. All of us in the gear industry work with many slippery substances. We must maintain our equipment, which necessitates the use of many different lubricants, as well as various cleaners. Each of these items, when accidentally spilled, can and does create a slip and fall hazard. I am sure that everyone reading this article has experienced a spill of this nature, and even with the best of intentions has not cleaned up the spill in a timely manner. It is important that we all realize that even something so simple as a spilled cup of coffee can cause a fellow employee to slip and hurt themselves. I believe that the most obvious offender in our industry—and probably the most common cause of slip and fall injuries—is coolant. Coolant is present on the completed workpieces when we remove them from the machine, and because of the configuration of gear teeth it tends to drip readily. I see many machines with large wet spots from coolant drips, and it normally occurs in the area that the operator is most frequently required to traverse.


How do we combat this hazard? I have seen mats that soak up the spills used generously around these machines. While these do soak up the spill, they are in themselves a hazard because once they become soaked they become very slippery, particularly between the mat and the floor

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beneath them. I also have seen a lot of rubber mats with holes in them to allow the liquids to seep through and thereby create a more stable surface. While these work for awhile, the operator's shoes still soak up the liquids, and once they step off the mats they are subject to slip and fall. There is also the cleanup involved with these mats. They must be taken up and the liquids that have seeped through cleaned up before they reach the top of the mat. Most of us use an oil-dry type product for these cleanups, which works quite well, but the tendency seems to be to let it sit on the spill for an extended period of time so that the oil-dry in itself becomes a slip hazard. I have even

seen elaborate systems of steel grates over drip pans that empty into a collection system. This seems to be a good alternative, but I wonder how a smaller shop could justify the expense. So far we have only covered the common liquids that can cause a fall, but remember that tools, cutters, empty skids and pans, and many other items that are left lying in high-traffic areas can cause a slip and fall injury.

As you can see, I mostly have questions, not answers. I truly feel that the only viable solution to this type of problem is education. I believe that the time spent educating all of your employees on the proper methods and priorities of spill cleanup, and where the proper places are for the items sometimes left laying around, will more than pay for itself in the reduction of lost time due to slip injuries. The old saying, "cleanliness is next to godliness," is never more true than when an accident is prevented.

Last month we discussed the importance of GEAR EXPO when designing your safety plan—or, more hopefully, updating your existing safety plan. I would like to reiterate my comments. There is no better existing forum than GEAR EXPO, where all of the people involved in our industry meet, to get feedback and a better feel for what our peers are doing to promote safety in the workplace. Please plan to attend, and set aside a block of your time to talk about safety in your shop and in your peer's shops. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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