

# PREVENTING FALLS ON STAIRS

## Managing Hospitality Risk



### WHAT'S AT RISK?

A twelve-year study by NSU of claims against hotels shows that slip-trip-and-falls are the leading source of guest injury, claims, and insurance cost for the hospitality industry. Within the category of falls, the second leading source of accidents (after uncarpeted floors) is falls on stairs, steps and ramps. Fifteen percent of all falls, and fourteen percent of all dollars paid (\$8,035,041) were related to falls on stairs.

When someone falls on stairs they are exposed to greater-than normal risk of serious head, face and neck injury because they have not only the initial fall but the possibility of rolling, sliding and twisting until they come to a stop. Preventing such serious injuries should be a priority for all hospitality managers.

### WHAT ARE YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS?

All stairs should be built and maintained to Code. Traditionally, several building codes were used in the U.S., which addressed requirements for stair construction. In the year 2000 all of these codes were unified and published as a single National Building Code. If your locality has not adopted a code, or if certain conditions have been "grandfathered" in, this is generally not an excuse for poor construction if a claim is filed. Plaintiffs will assert that a reasonable business owner would minimally meet generally accepted and recognized construction practices. The wise hotel manager makes sure that all stairs on the property have tread depth and riser height uniformity, surfaces with slip resistance, easily gripped handrails at the proper height and length, contrast between flat walking surface and stair flight, and adequate lighting.

Even if your stairs meet code, you must maintain them in safe condition. An increasing number of state courts are shifting the burden of proof in slip-and-fall cases. A hotel must prove through documented, routine inspections, that it took reasonable precautions to keep all walking surfaces free from hazards.

Materials should never be stored, even temporarily, on stairs. Spills or debris should be cleaned up immediately. Warning signs should be provided until conditions are once again safe.

### HOW CAN YOU BETTER PROTECT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

For some suggestions designed to assist you in developing sound policies and procedures for your organization, please turn this document over and review the attached checklist.

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For more information about this and other hospitality risk management topics, please contact:

**National Specialty Underwriters, Inc.**  
10900 NE 4th St.  
Suite 1100  
Bellevue, WA 98004  
(425) 450-1090  
[www.nsui.com](http://www.nsui.com)



# Checklist: Preventing Falls on Stairs

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Develop a slip and fall prevention policy.
- Analyze losses to observe trends and to measure your program's effectiveness.
- Design and maintain your property to reduce potential slip and fall hazards.
- Maintain good housekeeping practices.
- Conduct periodic walkthrough inspections to help identify and correct slip and fall hazards.
- Educate employees on slip and fall hazards.
- Conduct thorough accident investigations.

## STAIRWAYS

- Are handrails and guardrails in place and at correct height?
- Are handrails connected securely (not loose)?
- Are treads and risers in good condition?
- Are risers of uniform height and treads of uniform width?
- Is the stairway clear and unobstructed (nothing blocking stairway entrance or exit and nothing on the stairway)?
- Are stairway treads adequately slip-resistant?
- Is the stairway free of water, oil or other liquid that can cause slippage?

- Is all carpeting on stairway securely fastened with no loose edges?
- Is carpeting on the stairway free of wears/tears/loose areas?

## RAMPS

- Are handrails in place (if ramp run is longer than six feet) and at correct height?
- Are handrails securely connected?
- Is the ramp surface adequately slip-resistant?
- Is the ramp clean and unobstructed?
- Is the ramp free of water, oil or other liquid that can cause slippage?
- Is the ramp designed so that liquid cannot accumulate on surface?
- Is all carpeting on ramps securely fastened with no loose edges?
- Is carpeting on ramps free of wears/tears/loose areas?
- If your routine inspections reveal deficiencies in any of these areas, the situation should be corrected immediately, and you should clearly document the actions you have taken.