



GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY— LEVERAGE OSHA'S NEW RULE

A certified mat-safety expert who's testified in liability lawsuits addresses OSHA's floor-safety regulation

By Fred Anderson

With OSHA's new Walking and Working Surfaces Rule that took effect on Jan. 17, many employers are concerned with how the new rules might affect them. Most of this rule focuses on ladder safety, fall protection, rolling stock, body belts, etc. Tucked away in this regulation is the true definition which our industry can use to catapult our businesses upward, offering products and solutions that contribute to cleaner, safer workplaces, thus helping to reduce accidents—especially lost-time accidents!

RULE REQUIREMENTS

OSHA recognizes that accidents involving slip, trips and falls in the workplace are increasing in frequency. One out of every six slip, trip and fall accidents leads to lost time away from work for an employee. On average the injured employee will miss 31 work days while

recuperating. This has become a \$70 billion headache for employers.

OSHA states that "Walking and working surfaces" means any surface on which "employees perform or gain access to their job duties or upon which employees are required or allowed to walk or work while performing assigned tasks." This, along with the OSHA General Duty Rule (employers must provide their employees with a workplace free of recognized hazards) will play an integral role in providing guidance to our customers and prospects for proper floor matting in their places of business.

In order for OSHA to enforce such rules, they rely on the latest versions of national consensus standards for guidance and as references in creating safe workplaces. One such standard is, ANSI/NFSI B101.6 STANDARD GUIDE FOR COMMERCIAL ENTRANCE MATTING IN REDUCING SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS. OSHA will rely on this standard (along with other consensus

standards) to guide the agency during its on-site inspections.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

OSHA looks to employers to provide a "Qualified Person" who is 1.) knowledgeable and familiar with all relevant manufacturers' specifications and recommendations; 2.) capable of identifying existing or potential hazards in specific surroundings or working conditions that may be hazardous or dangerous to employees; and 3.) trained for the specific task assigned.

When a qualified person is supervising the work, that person shall have the authority necessary to carry out the assigned work responsibilities. There's no industry better qualified to provide the professional people and audits to assist customers and prospects alike with any and all documentation needed to satisfy an OSHA inquiry or inspection. But being proactive on this issue is paramount!

Remember, OSHA is focused on musculoskeletal disorders and is addressing ergonomics in the workplace. Under this standard, operators need to address anti-fatigue matting. It's well documented (*JAMA*, November, 2003) that lost worker productivity and related health problems are costing American employers more than \$61 billion annually. The average employee costs their employer more than 23 days yearly (an average of four hours a week) due to reduced performance related to discomfort. Companies that sample this product to safety managers and safety committees are doing their customers a great service as they grow their own business. Good partnerships lead to long-lasting business relationships. No business operator who provides genuine value to a customer can go wrong! Those who've invested in training are poised for success. For those who are behind the curve, it's not too late to get on board. **TS**

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