

Selecting the right footwear to avoid falls from vehicles

Information sheet WPT04

This information sheet is for drivers, those who buy safety footwear for drivers and anyone who will work at height on vehicles.

Slip resistance

Selecting the right sole for the surface and contamination type can prevent many slips. However, the wrong footwear can increase the risk of slips and trips.

Most drivers wear safety boots, which have a steel toecap to protect them from falling objects, these boots may or may not be slip resistant. Some of these boots are marked 'oil resistant'. This relates to how the sole material becomes harder, softer or weaker due to oil impregnation – it is nothing to do with slip resistance.

The slip resistance of footwear varies enormously, and claims of slip resistance in footwear catalogues may be of little help. Choosing footwear is made more difficult by the variety of surfaces on a vehicle. The shoes that work well on the cab steps may not work on the tail lift, and vice versa.

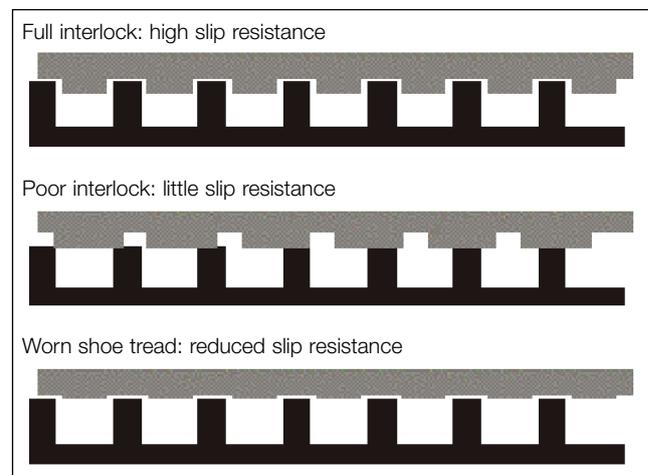
Fifth wheel catwalk

The surfaces used in covering the fifth wheel area (including the battery unit) tend to be profiled metal, such as chequerplate, or plastic surfaces. Often, a mixture of surface materials is used.

Profiled surfaces generally offer less slip resistance in wet or contaminated conditions than expected. Aluminium chequerplate is normally more slippery in the wet than gridded or punched metal surfaces. Where the tread of the shoe can lock into the surface pattern, slip resistance is good. Where the shoe treads do not lock into the surface, there is no slip resistance and the surface roughness of the top of the pattern is the only factor which can reduce slipperiness.

Where a mixture of surfaces are present on a load bed, a particular shoe may grip well with one surface and poorly with another, giving the operator an inconsistent level of grip. Slip accidents often occur when there is a significant change in available grip, such as when walking from a good, slip-resistant surface to a slippery surface. Consistency in surfaces used next to one another eliminates this potential hazard.

Figure 1 Interlock between the sole of a shoe and a profiled metal surface



To help reduce slip accidents, slip-resistant footwear is available, which has higher levels of grip in wet conditions.

How can I choose the best footwear for my task?

- Taking advice from specialist suppliers and testing different footwear is probably the best way to arrive at a good solution in terms of comfort, fit, durability and slip resistance.
- It is important to involve the workforce in choosing footwear as they are the ones who will have to wear it.

Case study

The style of footwear can also make a difference to the likelihood of someone slipping while gaining access to the vehicle.

A waste disposal company found that their employees were reporting many slips and falls. The workers usually wore rigger boots, which are common on construction sites. By changing the boots to a type with laced fastenings, the number of slips and fall injuries has been reduced. Different types were trialled before the final choice was made.

Keeping footwear in good condition

Many drivers work in conditions where their footwear regularly gets caked in mud, eg on construction sites, farms or other outdoor sites. Where footwear does get mud or dirt on it, drivers need to be able to clean it off before they walk on surfaces where they are likely to slip.

Further information

HSE website: www.hse.gov.uk

Workplace transport: www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport

Slips and trips: www.hse.gov.uk/slips

Falls from height: www.hse.gov.uk/falls

Preventing slips, trips and falls from vehicles: The basics
WPT01 Information sheet HSE 2007
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt01.pdf

Safe access to road-going vehicles: Specifying the right equipment
WPT02 Information sheet HSE 2007
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt02.pdf

Selecting flooring materials to avoid falls from vehicles
WPT03 Information sheet HSE 2007
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt03.pdf

Managing work to avoid falls from vehicles
WPT05 Information sheet HSE 2007
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt05.pdf

Delivering safely: Co-operating to prevent workplace vehicle accidents
WPT06 Information sheet HSE 2007
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt06.pdf

Further slip-resistance testing of footwear for use at work
HSL/07/33
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/research/footwear.htm>

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This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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