

Safewell OH&S Topic Guide

Grit/salting During the Winter



The following is a summary of general good practice and advice for grit/salting and hazard management when it is icy or snowy. An individual risk assessment for you as an employer may still be required but this should help you do this much more easily.

Summary of the Guide

Should we grit/salt? where should be grit/salt? how often should we grit/salt?

Legal Position

Employers have a duty of care to their employees and customers that might be at risk from hazards and risks related to the employer's activities. In the case of ice and snow both employees and 3rd parties (i.e. customers) may need to cross from the public highway onto the Employer's property where there might be snow, ice or both. A failure to identify this as a risk may leave the employer exposed and employees or 3rd parties at risk of slipping.

We get asked what the liability is if someone slips even if grit/salting has taken place and if it is better to not grit/salt i.e. not acknowledging that it is a risk.

There is no case law we are aware of where this has been proven to be a good strategy and our advice would always be - it's a potential risk and therefore needs managing in a way that is reasonable and sustainable for the employer and targets where employees and 3rd parties will be at risk. In doing this there may be an area you can't practically treat but if you have worked from a risk assessment and arrived at a basis for grit/salting areas where employees are likely to walk and the routes customers take to your premises, then you will be in a strong position.

Main Hazard & Outcome

- Slip during routine work tasks i.e. accessing a yard to take the rubbish out
- Customers slip on the outside floor at client premises i.e. the car park, path to the entrance or reception
- Customers slip on public areas enroute to client's premises
- In all instances, the accident is likely to be a fall on concrete or a very hard surface
- Injuries range from twisted ankles, severe bruising, groin strain, fractures to pelvis and wrists, sometimes head injuries

Top Tips on How to Manage the Risks

Consider this hazard in your risk assessments, document your finding and plan of action. Some considerations that may help you are below; REMEMBER what you do has to match your risk not someone else's.

Grit/salting

Grit/salting is a good idea

- Think about where employees and 3rd parties actually walk
- Identify what is your property and what is public i.e. pavement looked after by local authority

Area that Might be good to grit/salt

- Entrance porches to shops
- Area outside reception
- A clear walkway from the car park to reception
- The main walked routes in a car park
- Delivery yard areas
- Back yards to shops that lead to the rear fire exit or bins
- External fire exit route
- Fire exit routes across roofs
- Areas in constant shade, so stay icy for longer
- Slopes and gradients where vehicles and pedestrians move

You don't need to grit/salt the public highway

Car Parks

Grit/salting a large car park can be a challenge, in your risk assessment you may want to consider:

- if the car park is smooth (may get more slippery)
- rough (better grip)
- if there are organised vehicle and pedestrian routes it is easy to know where to grit/salt
- if there are no marked parking or walkways you need to decide where to grit/salt and use signage to make it very clear the routes to take. These should be at the car park entrance and periodically positioned for clarity
- you may need to clear snow first then grit/salt
- choose if you need to cone off higher risk areas or areas of the car park that are further away from the entrance that are not required.
- timing of grit/salt to avoid persons mixing with vehicles on icy/frosty ground
- ensure lighting in the car park is adequate all year round
- the task shouldn't take too long – having someone out gritting/salting for too long may be counterproductive and increase an individual at risk of slipping or cold exposure; see Tools for the Job below

Activities that may put People at Risk of Slipping

- Taking the bins out
- Working in a yard
- Loading/unloading deliveries
- Customers visiting your work place
- Customers visiting a shop (moving from public to employer property)
- 3rd parties exiting cars in employer's car park and walking to the employer building
- Any activity where a 3rd party comes to the employer from the outside
- Any activity where employees must walk outside on employer property to get into work or during their working day
- Poor lighting outside

Tools for the Job

Small Area

- The simplest set up is a manageable sized bag of grit/salt (5-15kg), a bucket and a scoop. Put grit/salt in the bucket and use the scoop to spread the grit/salt about

Medium Area

- A push along grit/salt spreader can work very well. Make sure the handle is high enough to push comfortably and it's safe to use and clear blockages
- This may require a separate risk assessment and training
- Ensure it doesn't increase the risk of a bucket and scoop



Large Area

- Pull along salt spreader i.e. pulled by a small tractor unit like a ride on mower or a vehicle (useful for a school or large delivery or logistics areas)
- This will require its own risk assessment and documented trained records



Timing

Grit/Salt needs to be spread at the right time as salt doesn't work instantly – and it's not intended to melt large quantities of snow or ice. It needs sufficient time to dissolve into the moisture on the floor (so best early in evening before the frost settles and/or early in the morning before employees arrive).

There are some products such as 'Icemelt' which claim to work better directly on ice already formed.

- grit/salt down (ensure light is sufficient and no one working)
- For larger sites (more employees), a more structure strategy would be expected to manage the risk i.e. before the first shift arrives or the main influx of workers

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Personnel

- It is good to ask for volunteers.
- In a small business, it may be appropriate to suggest a Rota, but remember to consider those who may be more vulnerable when walking on a i.e. pregnant worker, persons with mobility or health issues etc.
- In a larger company, an external agency could be used
- Or dedicated in house teams (these would need training an annual refresher for the arrangements; and the tasks they undertake would need risk assessing

PPE

- Anyone grit/salting outside would need to be provided with warm high visibility clothing (waterproof if snow), suitable boots, a hat and gloves.
- A head torch or torch might be useful and access to a radio or mobile phone



Signage

If you need to direct people, visitors, employees, 3rd parties away from ungritted/salted areas use clear signage. Different signs will be available from signage suppliers.

Training

Once a plan of grit/salt strategy has been decided it should be trained to employees.

Further Thoughts on Grit/Salt

- if stored incorrectly grit/salt will go rock hard and be useless (moisture) – keep it stored a dry place
- starts to be less effective around minus 6 degrees
- no point gritting in the rain as will be washed away
- can get quite messy in terms of entry to buildings on footwear
- over time grit/salt tends to help degrade stone, concrete and tarmac
- another option is an ice carpet, there are other trip hazards to be aware of but it may prevent grit/salt being walked into a premise if highly trafficked such as a shop

