

SLIPS TRIPS AND FALLS: YOUR DUTY OF CARE

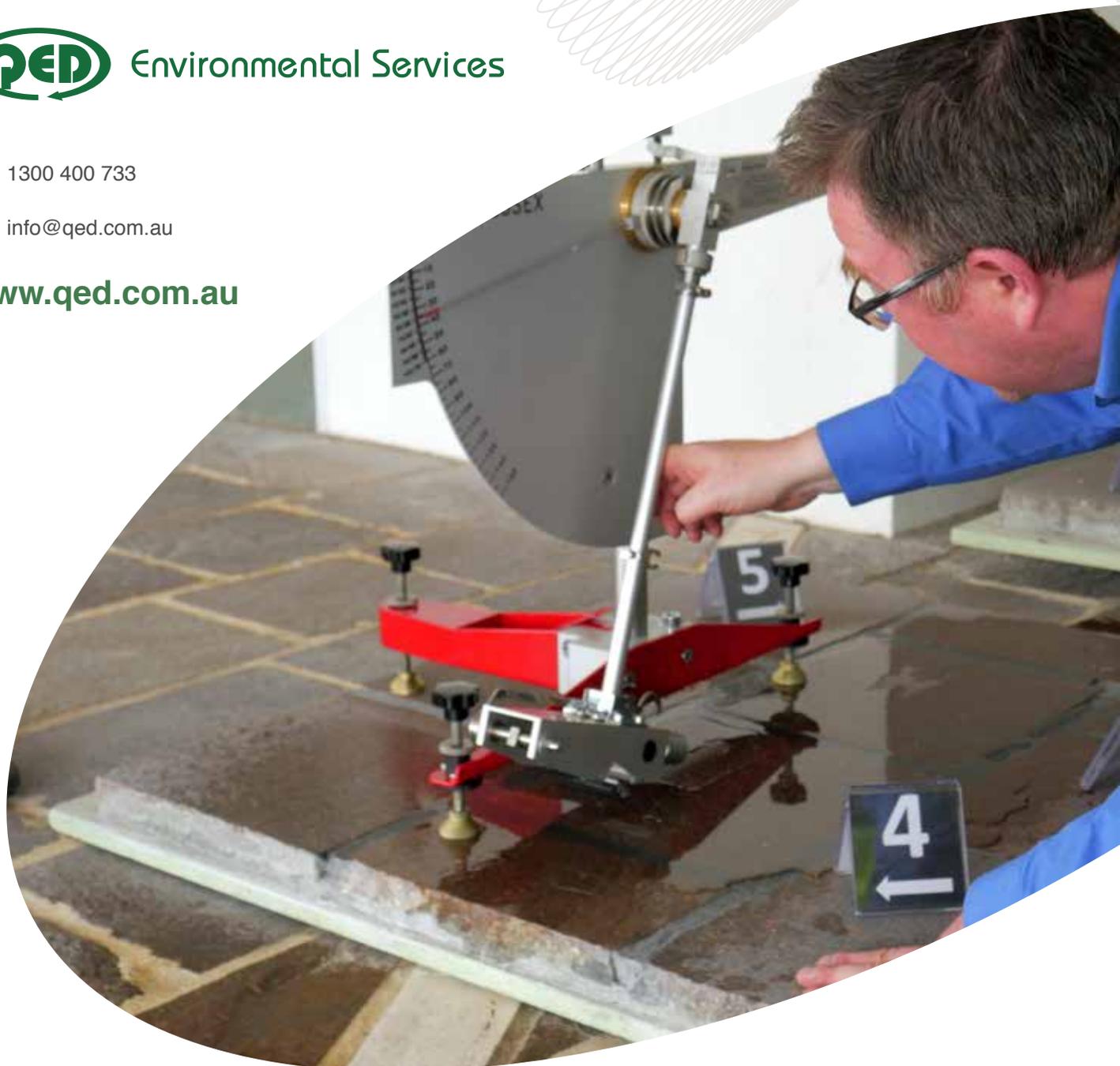
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Hotels face particular challenges when it comes to the slip resistance of surfaces because many areas accessible by guests, visitors and staff have high pedestrian traffic, exposing flooring materials to greater wear.

Hotel owners and managers have a legal duty of care and legal compliance obligations with regard to the risk of pedestrians slipping, tripping, or falling on floor surfaces.

SLIP RESISTANCE STANDARDS FOR DIFFERENT AREAS OF A HOTEL

It is important for hotel owners and managers to understand the minimum requirements for slip resistance in various areas of a hotel, according to the applicable Australian Standard.

For example, toilet facilities in hotels need a minimum P3 rating, whereas hotel rooms, bathrooms and en-suites, only need a P2 rating. The P rating of a surface indicates its resistance to slipping when wet – the higher the P rating the greater resistance.

In all commercial kitchens the highest anti-slip performance (P5) is required, as for all serving areas behind bars, though cold stores and freezers require a P4 rating.

The Australian Standard also covers external areas. Swimming pool ramps and stairs leading to water require a P5 rating whereas pool surrounds may have a P4 rating. External carparks require a P4 rating whilst the minimum for undercover carparks is P3.

A degree of judgement is required for some areas. A hotel lobby for example will often have polished or vitrified porcelain like surfaces for aesthetic reasons. This is relatively safe to walk on when dry but during wet weather it can become wet and unsafe. This possibility of moisture in the lobby may imply a minimum P2 or P3 requirement, whereas P1 is applicable if there's certainty it is always dry.

MANAGING RISK OF SLIPS TRIPS AND FALLS

Conducting slip resistance testing is important as it will help to reduce your exposure to:

- injuries due to slips, trips, or falls
- potential impact of litigation and liability claims
- increased insurance premiums

There are two major parts of slip resistance testing:

- initial assessment of flooring material in the laboratory enables suppliers to certify slip resistance of a product prior to installation or delivery to site
- ongoing monitoring of existing pedestrian surfaces by facility owners fulfils their duty of care and compliance obligations

Ongoing monitoring is required because flooring surfaces wear from pedestrian traffic and cleaning regimes. Regular testing of pedestrian surfaces is the main element of an appropriate risk management plan.

Accredited and independent slip resistance testing will determine if floor areas meet minimum anti-slip performance requirements, and regular testing can help to manage risks arising from wear and surface treatments such as cleaning.

For existing floor surfaces hotel owners and managers will generally choose in-situ testing by a qualified professional using accredited and calibrated equipment by the:

- wet pendulum test method, and/or
- dry floor friction test method

The wet pendulum test method provides customers with a slip resistance rating ranging from P0 to P5 with P5 being the highest rating possible. The dry floor friction test method provides customers with a pass or fail classification depending on the measured coefficient of friction over the test run length. This test is only valid for areas that are always considered 'dry'.



It is recommended that testing is conducted by an independent NATA-accredited service provider who is directly engaged by the hotel owner or manager. Testing should never be the responsibility of parties who have a natural interest in the compliance of areas they are responsible for (e.g., cleaning or refurbishment contractors).

For hotels, risk management planning can be quite elaborate when it comes to considering all surface areas where Duty of Care and Occupational Safety requirements come into play, so a tailored plan is recommended for each facility.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Know your legal duty of care and compliance obligations
 - Understand the differing minimum standards for slip resistance of surfaces in various areas of a hotel, for example hotel rooms (P2), undercover car parks (P3) and commercial kitchens (P5)
 - When planning for refurbishment, specify that flooring materials are assessed through a NATA accredited laboratory prior to installation
 - Test flooring surfaces for slip resistance at regular intervals because of wear from pedestrian traffic and cleaning
 - Directly engage a NATA accredited service provider who is independent of cleaning or building contractors
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Collins leads QED's asbestos management and slip resistance testing practices. He is qualified through the British Occupational Hygiene Society and has extensive experience preparing and delivering risk management plans in the built environment. Dave and his team undertake slip resistance testing of pedestrian surfaces at QED's laboratory and in the field.