

# Risk Focus: Slips, trips and falls

Representing nearly one in three of the large personal injury claims submitted to the UK Club





*What is so special about slips, trips and falls? They are 'accidents' aren't they, part and parcel of life; maybe something which have to be expected aboard ships, which are mobile, sometimes even violently moving, places of work?*

They are special because slips, trips and falls represent nearly one in three of the large personal injury claims submitted to the Club and which aggregate to a staggering \$155 m over the past ten years. They are constant too, with very little variation in numbers of claims from year to year.

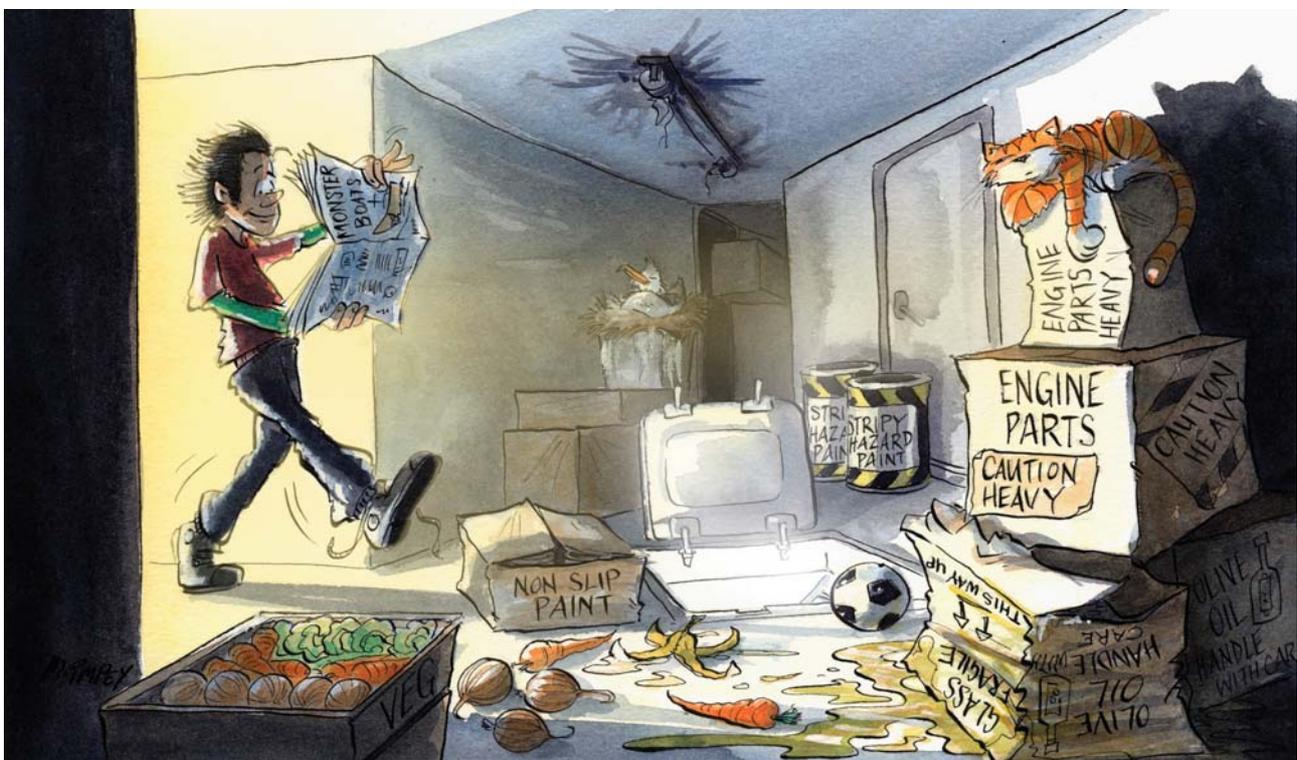
But they are also special because they represent, not just money, or the squashed metal or damaged ships encountered in other sorts of claim, but genuine pain and suffering from people who have been injured or even killed, because they have slipped, tripped or fallen aboard ship. So these claims go beyond numbers, each of them a story of individual injury, which has happened because of a moment's carelessness, thoughtlessness or complacency, as people have moved around a ship, possibly doing their jobs, or even just because the ship is not only their place of work, but where they live.

It is easy to dismiss these unpleasant accidents as 'human error', or even 'crew negligence', but to examine the detail of so many of them is to reveal other contributors to the chain of causation. Training could have been deficient or even completely missing, as there is often an assumption that people 'can look after themselves' and must take responsibility for their own actions. The environment, which is mostly a function of design, may well have been a contributor, if there was inadequate lighting, or the dangers were not obvious, or the particular design of the ship required people to put themselves 'in hazard' just to get a job done. And the procedures aboard ship may have been devised without

proper consideration of the risks of carrying them out. 'We have always done it this way!' may be no guarantee that it will be the safest way, and may involve people in taking hazardous short cuts. But because of the huge costs of these claims, and because of the human suffering represented by each of them, the Club strongly believes that a concerted attack must be made on the incidence of slips, trip and falls. These are accidents which occur for a reason, and if we understand the reasons behind the existence of these hazards rather better, then we can put in place controls that will hopefully prevent accidents occurring, but will also mitigate their consequences.

A proactive and precautionary approach can be very useful in reducing the incidents of slips, trips and falls, in first of all identifying hazards which have the potential to hurt people. Very often accidents occur because nobody has considered that what they are doing might be hazardous. Just walking around the ship with a sharp eye and an open mind can help to identify features which might, in an unguarded moment, hurt people.

It is very often not the obvious, like working at height, or with machinery, that will cause the accidents, because an experienced seafarer will probably be taking the proper precautions, and will be adequately clad with procedural controls in place. Rather, just moving around the ship, going up and down companionways and ladders, carrying weights or neglecting to keep 'one hand for the ship and one for yourself' are not infrequently behind very nasty accidents.



## SLIPS

How many slips are caused by people moving around slippery or greasy decks, possibly wearing inappropriate footwear? The answer is a large number, almost all of which could have been avoided with forethought and proper controls. But decks do get slippery! Of course they do, but in locations like mooring decks on the forecastle or poop, non-slip paint can make a huge difference to traction when handling ropes around drum ends, or simply moving about.

Isn't non-slip paint expensive? The simple expedient of stirring sand into deck coatings works wonders, if special non-slip paint is unavailable. If decks are greasy, or liquids have been spilt, a sensible control is to wash them down, before somebody falls over and hurts themselves! Precautions, housekeeping, good procedures – all make a difference, as well as the exercise of sensible seamanship by individuals.



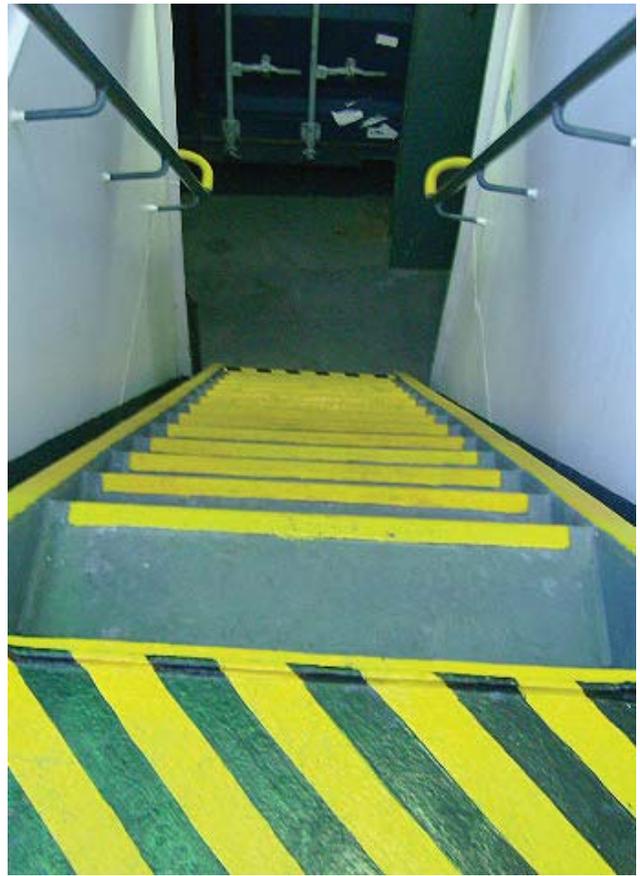
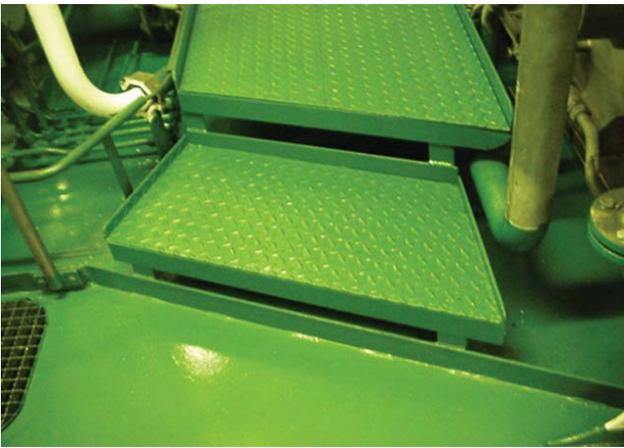
## TRIPS

Walking about a ship, how many trip hazards can be identified? All too often obstructions like ringbolts, lugs or sills will be found in a direct line where somebody needs to walk to get from A to B. It may not say much for the designers of the ship, but 'human element design' has come along only recently! And one do the same walk around after dark, and discover that lighting around these obstructions may be inadequate!



Just identifying these hazards, by day or by night, is important, but it is well worth considering what might be done to make them more visible and more obvious to somebody who is not so familiar with the ship. This is important work, because some of these hazards may be potentially lethal, should somebody trip over an obstruction and plummet down a ladder. A simple trip can become life changing, even life threatening and give rise to enormous claims.

Will the eye pick out that ringbolt or other obstruction on a dark deck? Five minutes work with a pot of yellow paint will make the obstruction obvious. That potentially deadly sill at the top of a ladder can be quickly made distinguishable by painting it a bright colour, while the



same strategy can be used to highlight hazards such as overhead pipes which can brain the unwary in the engine room or on deck. Top and bottom steps on ladders painted brightly, really will help people negotiate them without tripping up.



## FALLS

What fall hazards can be identified by somebody walking around a ship really looking for trouble? Are guard rails available and in place? Once again, is lighting adequate around ladders and gangways? Are gangway nets properly deployed? Are properly approved harnesses available (and always used) by people working at height, or down hatches, or close to the ship's side when railings are removed? More to the point, are people who might be endangered doing hazardous tasks, properly briefed in a 'toolbox talk', before they get on with the job? Are they wearing the correct personal protective clothing? Are ship's procedures for personal safety properly thought through and always adhered to?



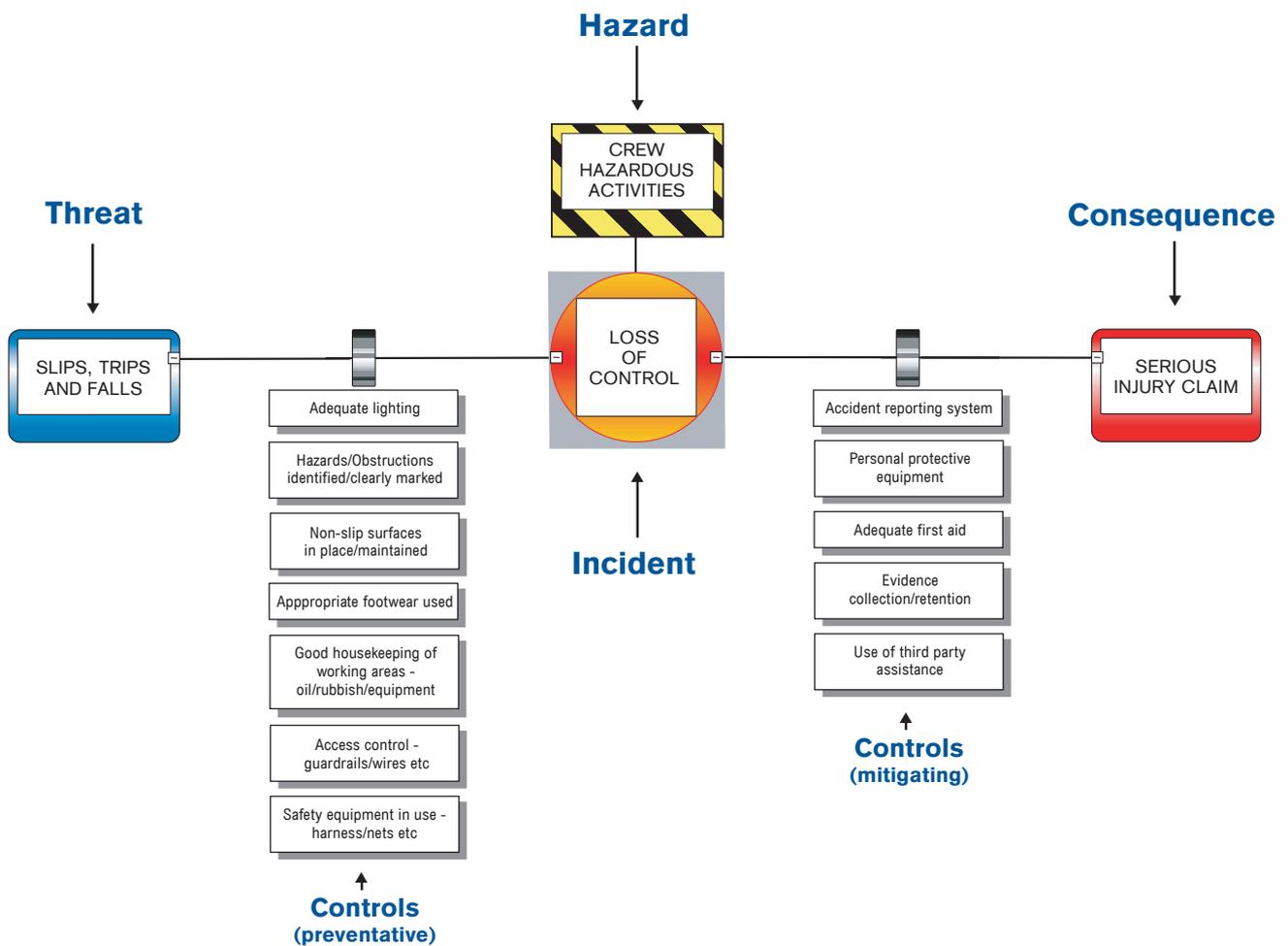
## Common sense

None of this is exactly 'rocket science'; all might be thought of as simple seamanship and common sense, but the Club's statistics confirm time and time again the absence of these precautions, and simple human carelessness, between them, really do cause enormous amounts of human misery and heavy claims. Not infrequently, visits to ships by the Club's expert assessors point to potential hazards that have not been identified and thus are left uncontrolled.

But self-help can be very effective, if those aboard a ship will recognise that they are in a good position to develop their own system of hazard identification and put in place the appropriate controls. Walk around your own ship with these hazards very much in mind and try to firstly identify them, and secondly devise the appropriate controls.

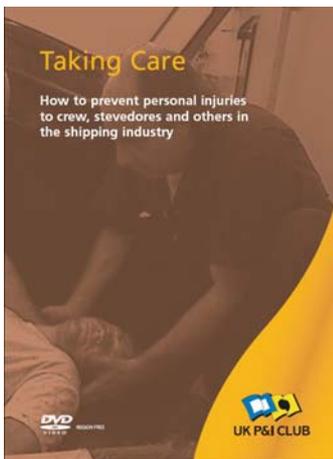
To assist in this process, the Club has developed a simple 'Bowtie' methodology that can easily be employed in developing effective precautions against slips, trips and falls; these 'accidents that are waiting to happen', but, with some effort and thought, need not!

# Bowtie methodology



## What are we checking?

How effective is that control, are there failures just waiting to happen (latent)?



## Taking Care video

### How to prevent personal injury to crew, stevedores and others in the shipping industry

The UK Club's *Taking Care* is one of the many Club videos that aim to increase awareness of the causes of P&I claims.

Members can order any of this material directly from the Club through [lossprevention.ukclub@thomasmiller.com](mailto:lossprevention.ukclub@thomasmiller.com)

It is also available to non-members through Marisec Publications. More details of how to purchase this material can be found at the Marisec website: [www.marisec.org](http://www.marisec.org).

