

THRIFT STORE OPERATIONS - PREMISES SAFETY

Like all businesses open to the public, thrift stores are legally obligated to maintain reasonably safe premises for the protection of their customers and employees. In the event of a slip, trip or fall claim, the organization may be liable for injuries if the incident occurred due to unsafe conditions on the property.

With the heavy amounts of foot traffic and inventory, thrift stores have an increased risk for slip and fall claims. This bulletin presents some general safety recommendations for eliminating premises hazards and reducing the risk of slip, trip and fall accidents.

SAFETY HAZARDS

Wet or slippery floors, inadequate lighting and clutter in walkways can pose slip, trip and fall hazards. As a thrift-store owner or manager, it is essential to practice good housekeeping and perform routine safety inspections and maintenance throughout the store, including the sales floor, employee areas and drop off areas. Consider the following recommendations to help maintain hazard-free premises and reduce the likelihood for slips, trips and falls at your store.

General Safety Recommendations

1. Maintain wide aisles to prevent overcrowding
2. Keep aisles free of trip hazards (i.e., clutter, boxes, extension cords)
3. Do not leave ladders, rolling racks or other handling equipment on the sales floor
4. Ensure flooring is in good condition
5. Keep walking surfaces free of hazards such as sharp or protruding objects, loose boards, corrosion, leaks, spills, snow and ice
6. Place non-slip/ water-absorbent mats near entrances and other areas where water, ice or snow may drip or be tracked onto the floor
7. Clean spills immediately and utilize "wet floor" signs when applicable
8. Provide adequate lighting in all areas (inside and outside)
9. Replace burned-out light bulbs immediately
10. Ensure emergency exits are illuminated and accessible
11. Ensure handrails, stair rail systems and guardrail systems are secured in place

Merchandise and Displays

Merchandise and displays can present trip hazards and cause injury. If improperly assembled or anchored, displays and shelving units may tip. Additionally, merchandise placed on high or overhead shelving can fall and cause injury or further tripping hazards. Consider the following recommendations to prevent injury from falling objects/items.

1. Fully stock end caps to prevent tripping over empty displays
2. Anchor display and shelving units to avoid tipping
3. Anchor heavy merchandise (i.e., furniture and large appliances)
4. Do not store loose merchandise on high shelves
5. Place heavy items on bottom shelves

Employee/Volunteer Safety

In addition to their customers, thrift store owners and managers must ensure a safe environment for their employees and volunteers. Employees and volunteers frequently handle and move merchandise, whether receiving donations or placing inventory. Along with those listed above, consider the following recommendations to help ensure the safety of employees and volunteers.

1. Provide a designated area for receiving merchandise/donations
2. Provide lifting aids such as hand trucks and dollies for moving heavy merchandise
3. Keep storage areas neat and organized
4. Arrange storage areas in a manner that minimizes twisting, turning, and overreaching
5. Do not let stacked boxes lean or overhang the shelving
6. Keep aisles, stairs, and working areas clear of merchandise, objects, and debris
7. Ensure storage racks and shelving are secure, stable, and suitable to prevent the risk of objects falling
8. Ensure there are safe means to access merchandise (i.e., platform steps, ladders)

Conclusion

Thrift-store owners have a responsibility to keep their property in a safe condition. Slips, trips and falls can happen anywhere. Retail stores can be held liable if they create hazards or fail to prevent known hazards. Thrift-store owners and managers can help ensure the safety of their customers, employees and volunteers by routinely checking for hazards and eliminating them before an accident occurs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Premises Liability and Safety Review Checklist

<https://www.glatfelterhealthcare.com/Portals/0/risk-resources/general-risks/GH-Premises-Liability.pdf>