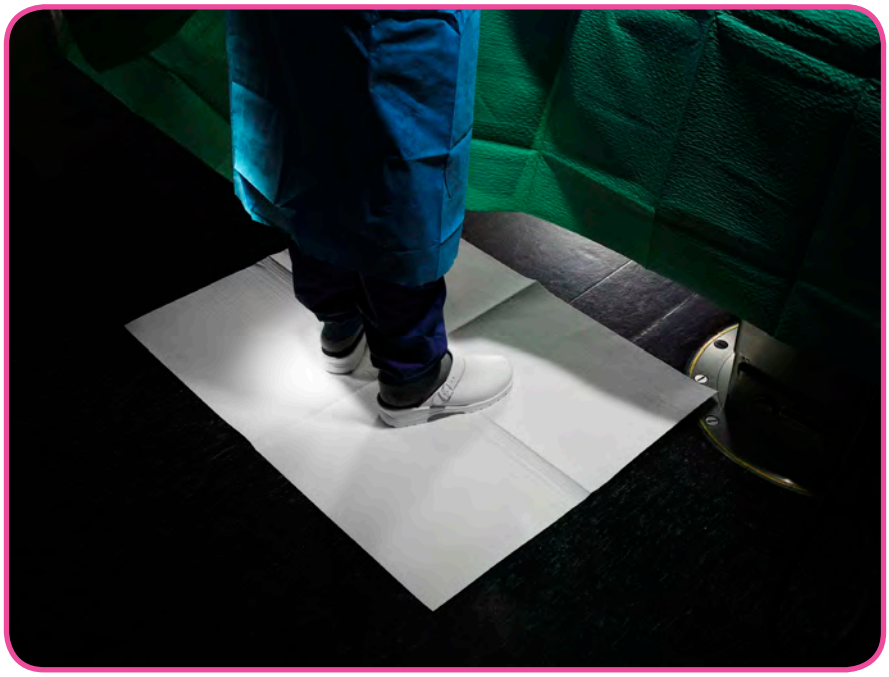
Safety in the operating theatre: eliminating fluid slip hazards

Ensuring operating theatre floors remain dry, clean and clear, will keep staff and patients safe, but keeping a busy operating theatre floor free of hazardous spills and fluids is often a challenge.



The risk of falls and accidents for staff in the operating theatre can have serious consequences; it is vitally important to ensure fluids generated during a surgical procedure are cleaned up efficiently and quickly. Theatre practitioner Rob Taylor was suddenly called into the operating theatre along with other staff. *"One of our surgical ODP's slipped on a wet spot on the floor and broke her hip and elbow,"* said Mr Taylor.

After ensuring the injured ODP received proper medical care and filling out a mountain of paperwork, Mr Taylor and his team conducted a root cause analysis to find out what went wrong and, more importantly, what they could do to prevent something similar from happening again. He said: *"The initial analysis led to some immediate changes."*

Of course, addressing slip hazards shouldn't wait until you're called to help an injured staff member. It's vital to spot and address potential problems before they become major incidents. Promoting a cleaner surgical environment reduces the risk of cross-infection and avoids spillages that could lead to slips and falls as well as endorsing a positive health and safety culture.

When cleaning up the operating theatre, mops can leave residue and take time to dry. Fluids produced during procedures are often cleaned up with towels, blankets and inco pads; but these quickly become heavy and saturated with potentially infectious fluid waste which is difficult to dispose of. This can be a risk to staff safety as they do not lock or hold in the fluids within.

Proper fluid management in a busy operating room can be delivered by utilising high performance superabsorbent floor mats that can be placed below the operating table, in front of, or beside the feet of the surgical team. They are highly effective at proactively removing fluid from the operating theatre floor; enabling faster turnover time with cleaning times and costs also significantly reduced as the fluids are absorbed and retained by the mats.

There are however some important considerations when choosing which superabsorbent mat to use.

It is important to use a mat that absorbs and retains a large amount of liquid. For example, up to 3.5 litres of saline solution or 9 litres of tap water. During absorption, the mat swells and its contents turn to gel. Some mats are dual-sided and can be placed on floors that are already wet.

It is also important that the mat 'locks in' the contaminated fluids without dripping as this helps reduce the risk of spreading contaminants. In this way, the mat contributes to infection prevention initiatives and staff safety. Consider also options available with a permeable non-slip top layer which prevents fluid from pooling on the surface, keeping feet dry.

Many surgical procedures which produce large amounts of fluid find these mats extremely helpful, these include: urology, orthopaedics, maternity, neurosurgery, burns and plastics.

It's now very helpful that highly effective products exist which absorb rapidly and safely and in turn reduce the risk of slips and falls, speeds up theatre turn-around times and contribute to a more efficient operating theatre environment and cost savings. ■

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