

Occupational Health & Safety

AUGUST 1997

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Amid the Ruins: Demolition Safety

Pier 1's Slip & Fall Success Story

Annual Buyer's Guide Issue



Pier 1's Slip-and-Fall Success

Looking for cost containment?

This national retailer used a prevention program to save millions of dollars.

Whenever a group of safety professionals get together, you can be sure at some point the conversation will turn to the issue of cost containment. Beyond the need to provide a safe environment for employees and customers, how to control the skyrocketing costs of insurance and accident claims is one of the most significant issues our profession faces. And it's an issue we face on a daily basis.

Like most retailers, Pier 1 Imports has experienced its share of slip-and-fall claims. One of our more unfortunate and costly claims involved an elderly woman who fell in one of our stores and fractured her hip. The resulting claim cost Pier 1 in excess of \$250,000.

Before we implemented our current prevention program, slips and falls were the number one cause of customer accidents and the number two cause of employee accidents at Pier 1. While ceramic tile floors are very attractive to look at and add to the overall visual appearance of our stores, they can pose a risk, especially when wet.

Because the weatherman often has difficulty accurately predicting the weather, it is especially difficult for a retailer to know when rain, ice, or snow may pose a problem in our stores. Add to this the potential for something to be spilled or for a floor to be wet from mopping, and you can begin to see why Pier 1 was looking for a way to reduce the potential for slip-and-fall accidents.

Like most responsible businesses, Pier 1 Imports has a company-wide safety program. Ours is called "Sold On Safety" (SOS). New store associates are trained in ways to prevent accidents. Monthly store meetings feature discussions of safety topics. Managers emphasize the impor-



By **RETA LEWIS**

CASE STUDY

tance of keeping stores clean and organized, with merchandise neatly displayed. Associates are taught to do routine visual

checks of the store to identify and correct any potential safety hazards they observe.

From a corporate standpoint, we also work to correct any safety hazards that affect our stores, such as changing the way we



package a product, if this would reduce a potential hazard. In addition, the loss control consultants of our insurance carrier visit different stores to help us ensure that we are providing a safe environment for our customers and employees.

We had never tried any of the so-called slip-prevention products then on the market because, frankly, the manufacturers couldn't produce any documentation to show that their products made a difference. Plus, we were concerned these products might mar the appearance of our floors.

Great Results in a Harsh Winter

In 1993, we decided to test a new system of products from a company in Bedford, Texas, that had actual data proving their products reduced slip-and-fall accidents even on wet surfaces.

We initially tested the products in approximately 100 stores in Seattle, Minneapolis, Denver, Chicago, and Miami, beginning in November 1993. It just so happened that the Eastern states were experiencing one of their worst winters ever, so we knew this was a real test.

When we went back to check the results of the pilot program in early 1994, we found that not one of the stores using the new system—even under extreme weather conditions such as snow and ice—had experienced one slip-and-fall-accident during the 80-day test period.

Based on these extremely positive results, we rolled out the slip-resistance floor maintenance regimen chainwide, specifying it for all our stores with ceramic flooring.

The system works like this. Hard surfaces such as ceramic tile are treated with two products—a safety treatment that restores the appearance of the floor while creating a slip-resistant surface, and a cleaning solution that maintains the traction performance and serves as a daily cleaner. To ensure employees understood exactly how to use the new floor care products, we gave them a laminated sheet of step-by-step instructions, which included a phone number they could call if they had any questions.



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CASE STUDY

Our employees reacted with enthusiasm. At the same time we introduced the new floor care program, we also began a major initiative to reduce tasks for our store associates so that they would have more time to spend with our customers. Employee feedback said that the products we used not only made floors more slip-resistant, but also were easier to use and took less time to apply than the floor cleaning products the employees had been using. And on top of this, the appearance of the floors improved, a situation that made our visual merchandising department very happy.

Addressing the Root Causes of Accidents

During the test, I learned that slip-and-fall accidents, no matter what the industry, result from the same factors: people's inattention, unsafe or unclean floor surfaces, inappropriate footwear, inadequate hazard identification, or

insufficient employee training.

Based on this knowledge, Pier 1 uses floor mats and wet floor signs in our stores as needed. We changed the dress code to allow store associates to wear low-heel, rubber-soled shoes if they desire, because leather soles, high heels, and dress shoes

Not one store, even under extreme weather conditions such as snow and ice, experienced a single slip-and-fall-accident during the 80-day test.

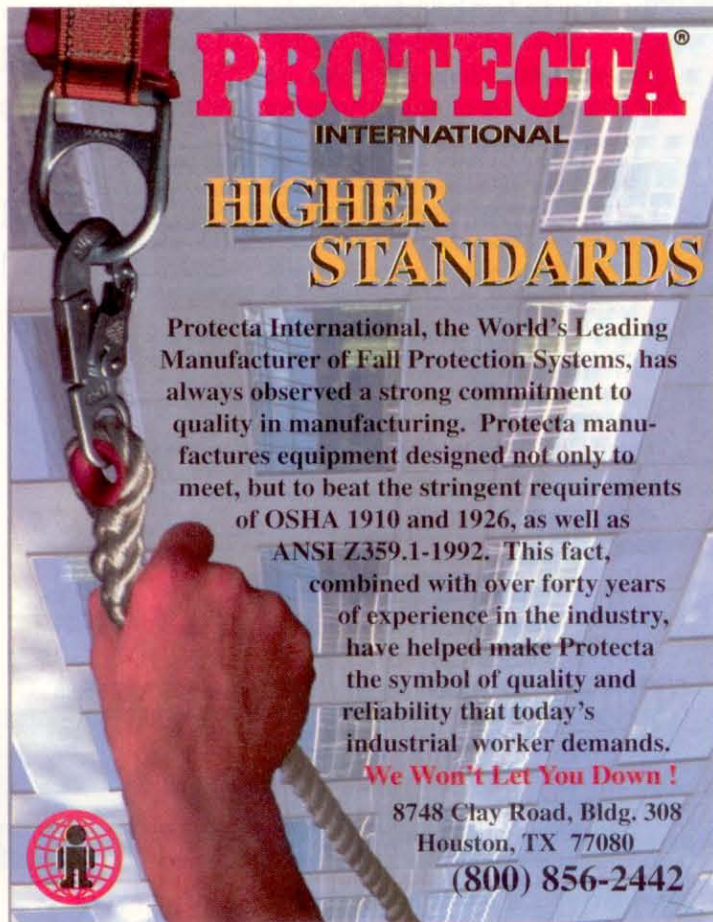
can contribute to slips and falls. We're also looking at a line of slip-resistant footwear that complements our new floor maintenance program.

The results of our slip-and-fall prevention program have been tremendous. During the past two years, Pier 1 reported the

lowest number of customer and employee accidents since 1988, when we had only 436 stores. Pier 1 now operates more than 700 stores in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. This translates to approximately 7,000 employees who serve hundreds of thousands of customers annually.

The number of stores reporting no accidents at all increased by more than 100 percent. Perhaps most satisfying to me as a risk management and safety professional are these facts: During fiscal year 1996, Pier 1 reduced accident costs by \$1.3 million. Our insurance premiums decreased by \$377,000. Our motto at Pier 1 Imports is, "Together, we can make a difference." Together, we have. **OHS**

Reta Lewis is senior manager of worker's compensation and safety for Pier 1 Imports, based in Fort Worth, Texas. She has served on the board of the Risk and Insurance Management Society and was named to the 1996 "Who's Who in Risk Management."



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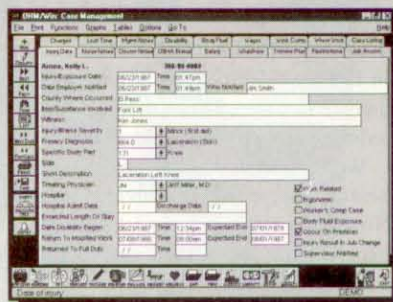

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