

CHAIN STORE AGE[®]

THE NEWSMAGAZINE FOR RETAIL EXECUTIVES

Lofino Food Stores Mops Up

Retailer sees decreased slip-and-falls, liability costs

Lofino Food Stores has reduced its slip-fall incidents and liability expenses with the help of an electronic floor-monitoring system. The system works to control the rising costs of slip-and-fall claims and reduce risks, and it provides Lofino with real-time floor-monitoring data via the Internet.

"This system has helped our company so much with regard to slip-and-fall claims and liability. It's a simple concept, but it has produced dramatic results in a short amount of time," says Joe Miller, loss prevention manager, Lofino Food Stores, Beavercreek, Ohio, which operates 13 supermarkets under several banners.

Lofino is using the GleasonESP (electronic slip/fall prevention) system from Gleason Technology. The retailer was inspired to try the system on the recommendation of its insurance company, Brower Insurance Agency, Dayton, Ohio. Lofino selected

its Cub Foods store in Trotwood, Ohio, as the test site. At the time, the location was experiencing about eight slip/fall

During a full year-long trial, the store recorded a total of only four claims, down 88% from previous levels.

"The difference was amazing," says Miller, who credits the drop in claims to cleaner floors with fewer hazards.

The reduction at the test site led to the subsequent rollout of the floor-monitoring system at three additional locations. Together, the four stores saw their incurred expenses for liability claims drop 67%, from \$62,500 to \$20,600, in one year.

Inspections: With the GleasonESP system, employees inspect the floor on an hourly basis using a handheld monitoring device that logs floor conditions at the time of inspection. The information is downloaded to a central computer at Gleason's



Lofino Food Stores reduced slip-and-falls with a new floor-monitoring system.

claims per quarter.

"It was one of our worst stores in terms of slip-and-fall claims," Miller adds.

headquarters in Malvern, Pa., providing a permanent record for the store. Management reports are available to

retailers within 24 hours of data upload via the company's Web site, giving them next-day information about their stores.

"What's great is that I have access to all our locations," Miller says.

Another reason Miller likes the system has to do with the reliability of the data.

"Gleason is responsible for all the data collection and develops the raw data into the reports," he explains. "It provides a third-party verification of the data that documents floor inspections and clean-up of spills. That's important if you ever have to go to court."

Because the system records each floor inspection and produces reports for the loss-prevention manager (or other appropriate person), individual store managers are more likely to make sure employees monitor the stores regularly, says Rob Snier, loss control manager for Brower Insurance. This results in spills and other hazards being identified and cleaned up in a timely manner.

"We have found that regular floor walks ultimately produce a cleaner store with fewer slip-and-fall hazards," Snier adds.

The primary tool of the GleasonESP system is a handheld data retriever that collects information every time it is touched to an identification (ID) marker. The floor inspection begins when an employee touches the data retriever with an ID marker matched to his or her name. The employee then follows a

predetermined route around the store and touches the data retriever to location ID markers that have been installed along the way. The markers, which resemble small silver buttons, are located at strategic points around the store.

The number of markers can vary depending on store size. At 65,000 sq. ft., Lofino's largest location has 30 markers. Its smallest unit, about 14,000 sq. ft., has eight.

If an employee discovers a hazard, he or she touches a special marker (marked "wet" or "other") on a touch card attached to the data retriever and calls for a cleanup. Once the hazard has been removed, the employee touches the "cleaned-up" ID marker on the card. A log of the activities is transmitted electronically from the data retriever to Gleason Technology.

Because the system is all electronic, it eliminates the inaccurate record keeping and falsifying data that can make manual sweep logs ineffective.

"You can't sit in the office and just fill out the GleasonESP system," Miller adds. "You can't fake it the way you can with a written sweep log. You have to be out walking the floor and touching the markers."

Miller receives detailed reports on a weekly basis from Gleason that include compliance information indicating the percentage of walks completed per store and specifying, by name, who did the walk.

"The reports are very thorough and accessible," he says. "For example, it's

easy to see if a store isn't doing as many inspections as it should or if the walks are being done late."

Initially, Miller says, store managers worried that the floor-monitoring system would be time-consuming. However, they were quickly won over.

"After we installed the system in the first store and the managers saw how easy it was to implement, they became its biggest advocates," Miller adds. "And their concerns about the time turned out to be unwarranted. Barring a major spill, it takes only 12 to 15 minutes to inspect our largest store."

Along with reducing slip-and-fall hazards, the floor-monitoring system has improved floor appearance.

"While our floors were never dirty, they are now cleaner than ever thanks to the regular inspections," Miller says. "Even our contracted floor cleaners noticed the difference."

The electronic monitoring system can be easily modified for use in other areas of store operations. Lofino uses it to make sure the freezer doors are shut and the back doors are properly secured, for example.

"You can basically put the buttons on anything you want to be inspected on a regular basis," Miller says.

Lofino has rolled out the system chainwide and plans to install it in all new stores. It has been a good investment for the chain, according to Miller.

"It has worked out very well," he says. "The payoff is just outstanding." ■



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