



Electronic Slip/Fall Protection System Dramatically Reduces Liability Losses for Southern Supermarket Chain

To combat the increasing cost of liability claims for slips and falls, Georgia-based Harveys Supermarkets worked with Gleason Technology to implement better store safety practices, including the installation of a technology-based risk management system that helps to automate its floor monitoring process. As a result, within a year, the 45-store chain significantly reduced its slip/fall incidents, and claim costs plummeted by 72 percent – on top of significantly reduced premium costs.

Harveys' success is no accident. The savings in claims and insurance premiums is attributed to Harveys' selection of Gleason Technology (a former division of The Gleason Group of Johnstown, Pa.) to provide slip/fall prevention experience and its patented electronic monitoring system.

After assessing Harveys' situation with store management, Gleason Technology was commissioned to install the GleasonESP™ electronic slip/fall protection system (U.S. patent 6,078,255) in the 16 Harveys stores experiencing the greatest number of slip/fall claims.

The system requires regular floor inspections by employees using a handheld monitoring device that logs floor conditions at the time of inspection. This information is downloaded weekly to a central computer at Gleason Technology's headquarters in Philadelphia, providing a permanent record for the store.

"We've always tried to be proactive in keeping our store safe for our customers, but haven't always been able to keep the proper records," said Joe Alford, director of loss prevention for J. H. Harvey Co., Nashville, Ga. "With GleasonESP, record keeping is simplified and more reliable and more complete. Plus, we have better management tools to assure that our employees are maintaining a safe environment for our customers."

Prior to working with Gleason, Harveys was self-insured, which means it paid a significant amount of its claims costs directly. Alford was skeptical that Harveys could ever afford first-dollar coverage, in which an insurance company pays all claims costs, because of the higher premiums required for insurance companies to assume this greater risk. Alford read about GleasonESP in a Food Marketing Institute (FMI) bulletin, however, and was intrigued enough by the potential cost savings of the system to investigate insurance options with the company's former parent, The Gleason Group.

"We negotiated a first-dollar insurance premium, discounted because we installed GleasonESP. As a result, our insurance costs were actually reduced 25 percent," said Alford. "Within a few months, Gleason installed the system in 16 of our stores and provided slip/fall prevention training to store managers in *all* 45 of our stores."



GleasonESP™ application — The GleasonESP™ system comprises a hand-held data retriever that is used by employees to identify potential hazards throughout the store. The specially designed retriever collects and stores information, and transmits the data to a central computer where it is processed to provide chronological, management and hazard reports.

In stores that received training, but not the GleasonESP system, employees looked for hazards during scheduled floor sweeps, which were recorded when the employee punched a time clock. In GleasonESP stores, both hourly sweeps *and* floor walks were required, but were not usually conducted by the same employee.

One year after Gleason began working with Harveys, increased slip/fall prevention awareness helped the entire company achieve an 8 percent reduction in the number of claims and a 72 percent decrease in the cost of claims. The greatest reductions were from the stores using the GleasonESP system. These stores achieved a 10 percent decrease in the number of claims, twice the reduction seen in Harveys' 29 stores without the new system.

The GleasonESP stores also achieved a 78 percent decrease in the cost of its claims, while non-GleasonESP stores reported a 64 percent reduction in claim cost. In total, the company saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in reduced insurance costs and claim payments.

How GleasonESP Works

The primary tool of the GleasonESP system is a hand-held data retriever that collects information every time it is touched to an identification (ID) marker. These markers, which look like silver buttons, contain a data chip that holds one piece of information, such as the name of an employee, a location in the store or a description of a hazard.

Once an hour, a store employee conducts a floor walk. The floor walk begins when the employee touches the data retriever to an ID marker matched with his or her name. These employee ID markers are typically hung in the manager's office. The employee then follows a predetermined route around the store and touches the data retriever to location ID markers along the way. The route is strategically designed to take employees past high-risk areas, such as the produce department.

If the employee discovers a hazard, he or she touches one of the hazard ID markers on a touch card attached to the data retriever, which describes the hazard as either "wet" or "other." He or she then calls for a cleanup and remains at the site until the hazard has been removed. The cleanup is then recorded by touching the data retriever to the "cleaned-up" ID marker on the card, and the monitoring continues.

Once a week, the data retriever is placed in a cradle, where a log of these activities is transmitted electronically to The Gleason Technology's risk management department.

Compliance Reports Encourage Accountability

Alford attributes much of his success with GleasonESP to the accountability built into the detailed nature of the reporting system. Each week, Alford receives compliance reports that indicate the percentage of walks completed per store and specify, by name, who did each walk. If one store has a low percentage of completion, Alford can easily determine which department or individual is not completing walks as required and take corrective steps.

"Employees know that we monitor these reports and that we will contact them if the reports show they are not completing their scheduled walks," said Alford. "This accountability keeps employees committed to the system, so most of our floor walks are completed in a timely manner, resulting in a safer, more profitable store."

For example, the GleasonESP reports showed that the produce and meat departments of some stores had a disproportionately high number of slip/fall incidents, which correlated to a low participation in floor walks from these departments. After Alford discussed solutions with these departments' managers, the number of incidents reduced dramatically, according to Alford.

The reports also include graphs that compare the percentage of walks completed by store, which Alford forwards to all store managers and supervisors.

“We think a little competition helps keep our employees motivated,” said Alford. “Everyone wants to see their store ahead of the pack, so they will be motivated to take appropriate corrective measures if that is not the case.”

In non-GleasonESP stores, employees are not aware of how their performance compares with employees at other stores, so they may not even realize there is room for improvement.

“With GleasonESP, we can enforce accountability at the store level, department level and employee level,” added Alford.

Accidents Happen Less with Greater Floor Surveillance

More completed floor walks translated into fewer claims and greater savings, and the results, according to Alford, are backed up by hard data.

While payouts were reduced for all 16 Harveys stores with GleasonESP, five stores actually posted increases in the number of claims compared to the previous year. Those had an average walk rate 63 percent. The remaining 11 stores had a higher average walk rate of 73 percent and either reduced or maintained their number of claims from the previous year. Thus, a higher walk rate correlated with a reduced claim frequency.

Routinely completed floor walks led to other, less measurable benefits as well. For example, the simple requirement that all department managers participate in GleasonESP floor walks impacted stores’ cleanliness.

“We require managers of each department to participate in walks,” said Alford. “During this time they recognize and resolve potential problems that otherwise may have gone undetected.”

The walks also provide an opportunity to interact with customers. Many customers will ask employees what they are doing, and are pleased to learn of the precautions the store is taking for their safety, said Alford. The stores reinforce this message with announcements over the loudspeaker each hour asking an employee to begin his or her safety inspection.

Harvey’s to Expand Program to More Stores

Following the 72 percent decrease in claims costs for Harveys stores in 2000, The chain reduced its insurance premiums by 14 percent the following year. Following the success of its 16 GleasonESP stores initially, Harveys added additional stores the following year.

“Our GleasonESP stores have a safe, clean feel that we think makes our customers feel better about us. We know it has resulted in improvements to our company’s bottom line,” said Alford. “We’d like to extend these benefits to our other stores as well.”

Harveys is currently evaluating stores with lower safety records to choose which should be the next in line to receive GleasonESP.