U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission: Mandate Big Floor Label their Products to Prevent Further Slips, Trips and Falls

This petition requests that the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) mandate manufacturers of floorcoverings and coatings to uniformly label their products’ slip-resistance per the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI) B101.5-2020 “Standard Guide for Uniform Labeling Method for Identifying the Wet Dynamic Coefficient of Friction (Traction) of Floor Coverings, Floor Coatings, and Treatments.”

We request that the manufacturers of hard surface, resilient flooring materials and topical floor coatings (finishes/polishes) be mandated to label their products DCOF to provide point-of-sale information about the product’s degree of slip-resistance in accordance with the labeling set out in NFSI B101.5 standard.

Currently, manufacturers of floor coverings are not compelled to provide the consumer any information as to the slip resistance of their products which has directly contributed to consumers being harmed by selecting flooring materials that did not have an adequate level of slip resistance. Floor covering manufacturers who do not routinely test and label their products slip resistance (Coefficient of Friction (COF)) include:

- Ceramic and Porcelain Tile
- Natural Stone (marble, granite, etc.)
- Resilient Flooring (vinyl)
- Synthetic Laminate Materials
- Finished and Engineered Wood (bamboo, cork, etc.)
- Floor Finishes, Polishes, Paints and Coatings
- Polished Concrete

In the absence of readily accessible slip resistance (traction) safety information provided via a single and nationally adopted industry consensus test method and an associated uniform product label, the consumer is at risk of selecting an inappropriately slippery floor and often falsely assume that all floors are safe for use simply because they are available for sale. Different types of floor coverings have wide-ranging differences in slip resistance, many of which may be inappropriate for specific use. This is true both for residential and commercial applications. However, the consumer, specifically the elderly, may only find out that they made the wrong choice after they have fallen and injured themselves. The failure by the floor covering industry to inform the consumer as to their products safety (traction) is one of the leading factors as to why so many Americans especially those of our nation’s elderly population slip and fall.

Although all floor covering consumers would benefit from the proposed uniform labeling system, the primary focus of our petition is aimed at protecting those most vulnerable from the risk of a slip and fall event that being our nation’s elderly population.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau approximately ten thousand (10,000) baby-boomers are retiring each day. According to the National Safety Council’s Injury Facts (2014 edition) of the 38,300,000 individuals who sought medical attention due to an unintentional injury, 1,930,000 took place in the home. Sixty-three thousand (63,000) Americans died in their home as a result of an unintentional injury. Of the estimated $793.8 billion cost for unintentional injuries (2012) $220.3 billion was spent on injuries which occurred in the home.

There has been a 38% increase in accidental falls for those age 65+. In 2005, 16,400 seniors lost their life as a result of an accidental fall that number has risen to 23,100 in 2014 and 28,487 in 2017.
In 2005, 20,200 Americans lost their life as a result of an accidental fall, many of which were same-level slips and falls. That number rose to 27,800 in 2014 and 33,000 in 2017. Over the past decade fall related fatalities have risen by nearly 52% and are likely to continue to rise.

**The lifetime risk of accidental death as a result of a fall is nearly equal to that of automobile accidents!**

Accidental falls disproportionally affects the elderly more than any other demographic age group of our society. According to the National safety Council (NSC), “Falls were the third leading cause of unintentional-injury related death in the United States in 2010, the leading cause of unintentional-injury-related death for people age 70 or older and the second leading cause for ages 64-69 for each year of age; deaths resulting from falls peaked at 1,178 for individuals age 87.”

Between the years 2004 and 2012 the economic impact of nonfatal unintentional injuries rose by 38% from $574.8 billion in 2004 to $793.8 Billion in 2012.

According to the National Health Interview Survey, 2011, 42.9% of females and 27.7% of males will fall and seek medical attention. Of the 37,872,000 injury episodes, 12,343,000 occurred in the home and 6,941,000...
occurred outside of the home. The study revealed, “Falls and motor vehicle incidents were the leading causes of injury-related emergency department visits, accounting for 26% and 11% of the total, respectively. In total, about 10.5 million visits to emergency departments in 2010 were due to unintentional falls and nearly 4.5 million were due to motor vehicle incidents.” Of the 29,310,000 unintentional injuries as identified via the E-code system, 10,512,000 were the result of a fall (E880.0-E886.9, E888).

In 2011, falls represented the leading cause of non-fatal injuries, which required emergency room treatment for all age groups.

We ask the Commission to mandate the use of the NFSI B101.5-2020 labeling standard which would require the identification via an easy-to-understand product label (below) of the flooring materials Traction as tested per the NFSI B101.3-2020. The label would provide a graphic of a gas gauge like traction scale with an arrow pointing to the products level of traction (modified DCOF).

The label’s purpose is to provide easy to understand information as it relates to product slip risk potential so consumers can make a more informed choice when selecting floors and or floor coatings.

The NFSI B101 committee intentionally created the NFSI B101.5 standard for the intended purpose of informing the public as to the slip risk associated with flooring materials and coatings whereby they could then make a more informed buying decision. We believe that if the consumer is informed as to the traction of a specific product that they would avoid selecting high risk (low-traction) products which would reduce the corresponding slip risk. Research contained below has demonstrated a direct link between traction levels and the risk of a slip and fall event. Unfortunately, today’s consumer is provided no information relating to the safety of flooring products which we contend is an underlying cause of many slip and fall injuries.

Today’s floor covering consumer has little to no information as it relates to the slip resistance and therefore
the slip related risk of the flooring materials they select for use in their homes and businesses. Consumers assume that all floor coverings are safe only to realize after a serious and debilitating fall that the flooring material they selected was more slippery than they thought. Most slips and falls are preventable and if the consumer is aware of the slip risk associated with various types of flooring materials they will be empowered to make more informed choices. Mandating the use of a uniform product label is the first step in reducing the growing epidemic of falls particularly to our most vulnerable citizens, the elderly. In the interest of public safety, we therefore urge the CPSC to require manufacturers of commercial and residential floor coverings and coatings to test their products per the NFSI B101.3-2020 standard and label their products per the wet DCOF label as defined in the NFSI B101.5-2020 standard.

Conclusion

Same-level slips and falls has risen to crisis level which demands immediate action. The growing problem associated with same-level slips and falls is serious, real and expected to get worse as our population ages. Technology exists and is widely used that can accurately measure the wet DCOF of walkways both in the laboratory as well as in-situ. Research has proven that the higher the COF the lower the risk of slipping. Since 2009 a series of nationally adopted voluntary standards consensus standards have been published via the ANSI consensus process and have proven to provide reliable and valuable information as it relates to (a.) DCOF testing methodology, (b,) accurate and reproducible tribometry, and (c.) correlation of COF test results with that of anticipated slip and fall incidents. Sadly, the manufacturers of floor coverings and coatings have consciously chosen not to adopt these standards which in-turn is jeopardizing the public's safety.

The floor covering industry continues to ignore the safety and well-being of the American public and in-turn is intentionally exposing our nations at-risk population to the unnecessary risk of a slip and fall event and related injuries. We therefore urge the CPSC to take immediate action to approve this petition as a means of protecting consumers from the unnecessary risk of a slip and fall.