

Safety Circular



Slips, Trips and Falls Prevention

Slips, trips and falls are consistently in the top three causes of employee and offender injuries.

Slips and Trips

The terms slips, trips and falls are commonly grouped into a single expression. However, we will focus on the first two terms, slips and trips, and more specifically, slips and trips on the same level. Although falls are certainly a result, this will concentrate on causes of slips and trips, and identify administrative controls to abate or minimize these types of mishaps. Statistics show that a majority of falls occur on the same level.

Conditions and situations that set the stage for slips and trips are:

- housekeeping;
- wet or slippery surfaces;
- obstacles in walkways; and,
- individual behavior.

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is important. If good housekeeping practices are not enforced, other administrative control measures implemented will never be fully effective.

If your facility's housekeeping habits are poor, the result may be employee injuries, ever increasing costs, and regulatory citations. If an organization's facilities are noticeably clean and well organized, it is a good indication that its overall safety program is effective as well.

Wet or Slippery Surfaces

A wide variety of surfaces are available indoors. Although most provide some degree of slip resistance in their original state, there are some exceptions. Highly polished floors such as marble, terrazzo, or ceramic tile can be extremely slippery even when dry, and the potential for a slip definitely increases when moisture is present.

Control measures that can be implemented indoors to prevent or minimize potential injuries caused by wet surfaces include the following (see next page):

IMPACT OF SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS



Wet or Slippery Surfaces (continued)

- Anti-skid adhesive tape is an excellent and economically feasible fix to combat slips or trips.
- During inclement weather conditions, moisture-absorbent mats should be placed in entrance areas.
- Display wet floor signs in areas that are wet and hazardous.
- Proper area rugs or mats should be used in food preparation areas or bathing facilities.

Obstacles in Walkways

Injuries can also result from trips caused by situations other than slippery surfaces, namely inadvertent contact with obstacles or other types of material (debris) and/or equipment.

Proper housekeeping in work and walking areas are still the most effective control measure in avoiding these types of hazards. The following are some additional control measures that can be implemented:

- Where mechanical handling devices are used, such as storage areas or warehouses, allow sufficient clearance for maneuvering of the equipment.
- Avoid stringing cords or lines across hallways or walkways.
- In an office environment, emphasize caution in areas where people leave carrying items such as briefcases, boxes, etc.
- Encourage safe work practices such as closing file cabinet drawers after use and picking up loose items from the floor.
- Maintain constant vigilance for slip and trip hazards through periodic inspections.

Individual Behavior

How many times have we heard the phrase, "I guess I just wasn't thinking" during an accident investigation? What is it that takes a person's attention away from the task at hand? Whatever the cause, something has taken a person's focus away from his/her current activity. By not staying alert, individuals lose site of what they are doing and they are not aware of hazardous floor conditions and their surroundings.

Being in a hurry will result in walking too fast, even running, or not focusing on the task at hand, and being completely oblivious to their surroundings. This can require rapid changes in direction of travel, and often a loss of balance. Additionally, lack of planning is a significant factor because people try to make up for lost time through speed.

Falls

Statistics show that falls from elevated surfaces are generally less frequent, but in most cases, more severe than same-level falls, such as slips and trips, in the workplace. More so, the degree of elevation varies considerably, ranging from simply uneven surfaces such as sidewalks, to working on elevated platforms such as docks and ramps. Conditions and situations that set the stage for falls are:

- Uneven surfaces
- Stairs
- Ladders
- Inadequate fall protection

Uneven Surfaces

Injuries from falls reported by state agencies cover the entire spectrum. However, interesting to note, a majority of these occur on walking and working surfaces that are not necessarily of any significant height. Any variation in walking surfaces greater than ¼ of an inch should be identified as a hazard and require corrective action to be taken to minimize the threat of injury.

Stairs

Falls are the second leading cause of accidental deaths in the United States. Of these fatal falls, statistics show that nearly half occur on steps and stairways.

To prevent a stairway fall, awareness and prevention remain the keys.

Before setting foot on a stairway, the following preventative measures should be physically in place, or consciously in your mind.

- Always use the handrail when going up or down stairs.
- Make sure the stairs are clear and free of all obstacles. Never use a stairway for temporary storage.
- Take extra care when ascending/descending steps while wearing footwear such as high heels, sandals, slippers, athletic shoes, or socks.
- Avoid carrying vision-blocking loads, keeping one hand free to hold onto the handrail. If necessary, make several trips with smaller loads.
- Be on guard for single steps when entering or exiting a room.

In addition to the preventative measures outlined above, steps and stairways located outside must be kept free of ice, snow, or puddles. Keep in mind that the chances of falling on stairways can be increased by inattention, illness, fatigue, haste, and the use of alcohol or drugs.

Fall Protection

Falls are among the most common causes of serious work related injuries and deaths. To prevent employees from being injured from falls:

- Guard every floor hole into which a worker can accidentally walk (using a railing and toe board or a floor hole cover).
- Provide a guard rail and toe-board around every elevated open sided platform, floor or runway.

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References: ♦ osha.gov ♦ sorm.state.tx.us ♦