

SLIPS, TRIPS, and FALLS

Slips, trips, and falls are a major source of occupational injury in today's work environment. Slips and trips cause approximately 100,000 injuries annually. Falls cause 10 percent of workplace deaths each year along with 350,000 injuries. These types of accidents are costly to both the employer and employee. Injuries include cuts, bruises, muscle sprains and strains, back injuries, and broken bones.

Slips

Slips are a loss of balance caused by too little friction between our feet and the surface that you walk or work on. This loss of traction is the leading cause of workplace slips. Slips can be caused by constantly wet surfaces, spills or weather hazards like ice and snow. Slips are more likely to occur when you hurry or run, wear the wrong kind of shoes or don't pay attention to where you're walking. Follow these safety precautions to avoid a slip:

Practice safe walking skills. If you must walk on wet surfaces, take short steps to keep your center of balance under you and point your feet slightly outward. Move slowly and pay attention to the surface you're walking on.

Clean up spills right away. Whenever you see any kind of spill, clean it up yourself or report it to the appropriate person. Even minor spills can be very hazardous.

Do not let grease accumulate on a shop floor around machinery. If grease is present in your work area, be sure that it is cleaned up promptly.

Be more cautious on smooth surfaces. Move slowly on floors that have been waxed but not buffed, and other very slippery surfaces.

Ice and snow present especially hazardous walk surfaces. When possible, remove ice and snow from sidewalks and parking lots before heavy traffic use and recommend proper footwear for the conditions.

Footwear

Wearing proper footwear can help reduce slips. Shoes with neoprene soles can be used safely on most wet or dry work surfaces. However, they are not recommended for oil conditions. Crepe soles are best for rough concrete, whether wet or dry, but are not suggested for tile, smooth concrete, or wood surfaces. Other devices are available to increase traction on your shoes. Strap-on cleats can be fastened to soles for greater traction on ice. There are non-skid sandals and boots that slip over shoes and offer better traction on ice, oil, chemicals, and grease.

Trips

Trips occur whenever your foot hits an object and you are moving with enough momentum to be thrown off balance. A trip can happen when your work area is cluttered, when lighting is poor, or when an area has loose footing. Trips are more likely to happen when you are in a hurry and do not pay attention to where you are going. Common rules to follow to avoid tripping can include:

Make sure you can see where you are going. Carry only loads that you can see over.

Keep work areas well lit. Turned-off lights and burned-out bulbs can interfere with your ability to see clearly. Do not grope in the dark. Use a flashlight or extension light to make your walking area visible in unlighted areas.

Keep your work area clean and do not clutter aisles or stairs. Store materials and tools in closets, cabinets, or specially assigned storage areas.

Arrange furniture so that it does not interfere with walkways or pedestrian traffic in your area.

Extension or power tool cords can be dangerous tripping hazards. Tape them to the floor or arrange them so that they will not be in the way for pedestrians.

Eliminate hazards due to loose footing on stairs, steps, and floors. Report loose carpeting, stair treads, or hand rails. Broken pavement and floor boards or loose floor tiles can also catch a foot and cause a fall.

Falls

Falls occur whenever you move too far off your center of balance. Slips and trips often push you off your center of balance far enough to cause a fall, but there are many other ways to fall. They are also caused by makeshift ladders, misuse of ladders, accidents while climbing, and improper scaffolding use. Most falls are slips or trips at ground level, but falls from greater heights pose a much higher risk of serious injury. Avoid falls of any kind with these safety measures:

Do not jump. Lower yourself carefully from docks, trucks, or work stages.

Check lighting. Make sure hallways, stairs, and work areas are properly lit.

Repair or replace stairs or handrails that are loose or broken. Report these types of hazards to the proper personnel in your company.

Do not store things on stairs or in aisles.

Wear good shoes. Non-skid soles are a good choice. Remember that high heels or platforms are less stable than flat shoes.

Always use proper equipment when you have to work at a higher level. Never use chairs or any other unstable equipment to reach higher.

Preventing slips, trips, and falls is a task that depends on many factors--most importantly--you. You may not be able to change your workplace, but you can recognize dangers, work to eliminate hazards, and use safety devices and equipment.