

Tool Box Talk

SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

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Although we have seen it in the cartoons and movies a million times, not many people actually slip on a banana peel. While the results produce a few chuckles in the theater, falls are nothing to laugh at. The fact is that about one in 10 deaths that happen in the workplace are due to slips, trips and falls.

Slips, trips and falls constitute a large majority of general industry accidents. Second only to motor vehicle accidents, slips, trips and falls are the most frequent accidents leading to personal injury. Slips, trips and falls can result in head injuries, back injuries, broken bones, sprained muscles, cuts and lacerations or even death. A slip occurs when there is too little traction or friction between the shoe and walking surface, often causing a person to fall backwards. A trip occurs when a person's foot contacts an object in their way or drops to a lower level unexpectedly, causing them to be thrown off balance and typically fall forwards. A fall occurs when you are too far off balance. Some factors contributing to slips, trips and falls include wet slippery surfaces, environmental conditions, insufficient or inadequate lighting, changes in elevations or climbing and descending stairways, and housekeeping issues in working and walking areas.

- **Wet and slippery surfaces** are a major cause of slips. On wet slippery floors use absorbent mats, remembering that unanchored mats may cause slip hazards themselves. Ensure that the mats lie flat and the backing material will not slide on the floor. Have a procedure to deal with spills and ensure they are reported and cleaned up immediately. If you must walk on a slippery surface, wear proper footwear for better traction, or use rails or another stable object that you can hold onto.
- **Environmental conditions** such as rain, ice and snow can cause major slip hazards. No matter how well snow and ice are removed from sidewalks, parking lots and the surrounding streets, people will invariably encounter some slippery surfaces. Many cold-weather injuries are the result of falls on ice covered streets and sidewalks. Getting around in icy or wet conditions calls for planning, caution and a little common sense. Streets and sidewalks that have been cleared of snow and ice should still be approached with caution. Look out for black ice as water vapor can freeze on cold surfaces and form an extra thin, nearly invisible layer of ice.
- **Insufficient lighting** can make it difficult to see obstacles or notice changes in a walking surface. Moving from light to dark areas or vice versa can cause temporary vision problems that may be just enough to cause a person to slip on an oil spill or trip over a misplaced object. Moving slowly can reduce the chance of encountering a hazard before there is a chance to notice it.
- **Changes in elevation** are a major source of tripping accidents. Even a change in walking surfaces of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch will be sufficient to cause a trip. Curbs, cracks in the sidewalk, flaws in parking lots, potholes, uneven lawns, ramps and single steps are all examples of these hazards. Most of these are not of significant height, but have the potential to cause significant injuries. If you identify a problem area, report it to your supervisor immediately.
- **Climbing or descending stairs** causes nearly half of all falls. Keeping stairs in good repair is essential to preventing accidents. Make sure the stairs have secure handrails and guard rails, even tread height, and are free of deteriorating covering to prevent an accident. Always use a handrails, make sure stairways are well lit and clear of any obstacles, routinely check stairs for loose or bent treads, report outdoor stairways if you notice ice snow or water accumulations, and when carrying objects up and down stairs be sure you are able to see where you are going and hold onto the handrail if possible.
- **Proper housekeeping** in working and walking areas can reduce the chances of slips, trips and falls on a work site. It is important to maintain a safe working environment and a clean walking surface free of obstacles such as clutter, material stacked or dumped in passageways and obstructions across hallways. Avoid stringing cords or lines across hallways or walkways. Regular, frequent inspections in working and walking areas should be conducted to identify environmental and equipment hazards which can cause slips, trips and falls.

Most slip, trip and falls incidents are easily preventable if you follow one simple piece of advice: *watch where you're going*. Walking is such a common activity that most people pay little attention to potential hazards, such as hidden steps, loose irregular surfaces, smooth surfaces, wet spots, and oil that can make it difficult for a person to maintain their footing. Ensure you report even a minor fall as it could prevent someone from experiencing a more serious injury down the line.



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