

PROPERTY & CASUALTY

Preventing Slips and Trips in the Workplace

By, Jim Zoda, *ARM* and Bruce Dortort, *CSP, WACH*



Slips and trips are among the most common causes of workplace injuries, accounting for a substantial portion of lost workdays, compensation costs and liability claims. Of the over 25 million non-fatal, preventable injuries reported in the United States during 2023, nine million are attributed to falls. That's over 24,000 each day. Falls were the second-leading cause of death from preventable injury in 2023, ahead of motor vehicle accidents. Individuals over the age of 60 were the most susceptible to accidental death by falls.

After a slip or fall, the typical time lost from work is 14 days, with the cost to the employer ranging from \$10,000 to over

\$50,000. Most slips and trips are preventable, and this article outlines practical strategies and best practices for mitigating hazards and reducing interior and exterior fall risks in and out of the workplace.

Hazards

Approximately 50% of slips, trips and falls are caused by hazardous walkway surfaces. Another 24% result from footwear such as flip-flops, high heels, improperly fitting shoes and those with poor ankle support. Recognition and awareness of hazards help managers, supervisors, safety specialists and others devise prevention strategies and practices.

Slips	Trips	Falls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet Spills • Dry product spills • Weather hazards • Polished marble and granite, glazed ceramic and porcelain tile or vinyl composition tile (VCT) flooring • Sloped or uneven walking surfaces • Wet, muddy or greasy shoes • Ramps or planks without slip-resistant surfaces • Ladders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uneven walkways • Improper/inadequate matting (i.e., buckled, rippled or curled edges and corners, cracked, ill-fitting) • Poor housekeeping • Obstructed view • Poor lighting • Unprotected cables, wires, hoses or extension cords • Open drawers, cabinets, doors, etc. • Unmarked changes in floor level • Unmarked steps or ramps • Missing floor tiles and bricks • Distracted walking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak or damaged ladders • Unprotected edges or ledges • Unsafely positioned ladders • Weak, damaged or failure to use handrails on stairs or steps • Carrying heavy objects



Frequently occurring injuries associated with slips and trips include:

- Strains and sprains: When a person slips or trips and attempts to catch themselves or regain balance, they may twist or stretch their muscles or ligaments, resulting in sprains or strains
- Cuts and lacerations: Falls may involve contact with sharp or rough objects, leading to cuts or lacerations
- Contusions and bruises: Impact with the ground or objects during a fall can cause contusions (bruises) from damaged blood vessels beneath the skin
- Fractures and broken bones: Landing forcibly on or against a hard surface can cause fractures or dislocations in the shoulders, arms, wrists, hips and ankles
- Head injuries: Falls that involve striking the head on a hard surface can cause traumatic brain injury (TBI), ranging from mild concussion to more severe injury, as well as facial injuries such as broken nose, orbital fractures and dental damage
- Back and spinal cord injuries: Falls that involve landing on the back or experiencing a jarring impact can cause damage to the spine, such as herniated disks, spinal fractures or spinal cord injuries and chronic back pain from muscle strain or soft tissue damage
- Neck injuries: Impact and force of a fall can damage muscles, ligaments or tendons of the neck

OSHA Regulations

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in 29 CFR 1910.22 imposes the following regulatory requirements for safe walking-working surfaces in the workplace:

- Keep workroom and work area floors clean, orderly and dry
- Walking-working surfaces must be maintained free of hazards such as sharp or protruding objects, loose boards, leaks or spills, snow and ice
- Provide safe means of entering and exiting from walking-working surfaces
- Inspect the working surface to keep it in good condition
- Repair hazardous floors as soon as possible

Slip and Trip Prevention

Preventing slips and trips requires a preemptive, dynamic and systematic approach that combines engineering, administrative and behavioral strategies. Employers, building managers and operators who prioritize and assertively implement continual and persistent practices to eliminate or mitigate fall risks will reduce slip and trip incidents on and off the job.

Engineering Controls

- Flooring/Walking Surfaces
 - » Install slip-resistant flooring or provide slip-resistant floor treatments in high-risk areas
 - » Repair cracks, holes and uneven surfaces promptly
 - » Cover or re-route cables, wires, cords or hoses away from walking pathways
 - » Provide appropriate safety mats for the conditions and floor markings in hazardous areas
 - » Arrange furniture to create open pathways
 - » Inspect stair surfaces frequently and regularly for wear, loose or damaged treads, nosing or handrails
 - » Provide non-slip treads or strips to each step, or use non-skid paint or coating to improve traction
 - » Add contrasting color to leading edges to indicate changes of elevation or uneven surfaces
 - » Mark curb stops in parking lots and sidewalk ramps with a contrasting color to draw the visual attention of walkers
- Drainage
 - » Ensure proper drainage to prevent pooling of liquids
- Handrails and Guardrails
 - » Install handrails on stairs and guardrails on elevated walkways or working platforms
- Lighting
 - » Improve visibility in all areas, especially stairwells and outdoor paths
 - » Report malfunctioning lights to the appropriate resources for repair/replacement

Administrative Controls

- Cleaning Protocols
 - » Minimize clutter and debris on the floor with rigorous and strict cleaning schedules
 - » Sweep or dust mop floors and walking surfaces daily to remove dust, dirt and debris
 - » Research and, where possible, utilize certified “high-traction” floor treatments and cleaning products
 - » Wet mop floors (daily/weekly frequency based on traffic/use) with warm water and mild detergents
 - » Inspect and spot sweep/mop as needed throughout the day
 - » Rinse floors with clean water to prevent the buildup of residue
 - » Steam clean/deep clean regularly using distilled/treated water when tap water is hard or mineral-rich
 - » Use polish or wax sparingly for shine and protection, strictly adhering to the manufacturer’s application and care instructions
 - » Always deploy wet floor signs during cleaning and provide a supervising monitor until the floor is dry
 - » Clean up spills as soon as you see them to enable and encourage employees to suspend non-urgent activities to respond to a spill
- Signage
 - » Alert workers and other walkers of spills and active floor cleaning/maintenance
 - » Alert workers and other walkers to trip hazards
 - » Establish ‘phone use areas’ with signage and markings to encourage mobile device use while stationary
 - » Provide eye-level mirrors and signs to discourage mobile device distraction while walking
 - » Footwear policies
 - » Wear slip-resistant or waterproof footwear on slip-prone surfaces and in frequent slip hazard areas
 - » Choose footwear with good fit to provide adequate grip and support, avoiding overly tight or loose fits that can contribute to tripping
 - » Avoid using sandals/flip-flops, open-toed shoes and high heels on uneven or slippery surfaces
 - » Regularly clean your shoes to remove dirt, grease or other debris that can reduce traction
 - » Check the soles of shoes frequently for wear and tear and replace them when they become worn out or loose
 - » Match footwear to the task, choosing footwear that is appropriate to the task and environment



- Training
 - » Conduct safety talks with workers to understand slip/trip hazards, implement spill response procedures to minimize hazards and always follow established slip/trip safety protocols
 - » Communicate risks and hazards of distraction from mobile device use while walking and encourage users to stop walking before using their phone
 - » Create and enforce ‘Stop to Use’ policies or employee safety pledges to modify behavior
 - » Provide reinforcement and recognition for employees following established protocols
 - » Provide correction and coaching when employees are observed ignoring or disregarding safety protocols
 - » Provide ladder use/safety training to employees who use ladders at any time

Behavioral Expectations

- Close file cabinets and desk drawers when not in use
- Never stand on chairs, tables or any surface with wheels
- Use carts or other mechanical aides to carry large or awkward objects that may obstruct vision of your pathway or affect balance
- Use handrails when ascending and descending stairs
- Do not attempt to carry heavy, large or awkward objects up or down stairs or ladders, using elevators if available
- Use mobile devices only when standing still or seated; do not walk while using the email/text functions or other apps on your mobile device
- Clean up spills (or other fall hazard) immediately, even if that means postponing the completion of a non-urgent activity to protect and clean up the spill

Responding, Investigating and Reporting a Slip/Trip/Fall

- Upon notification, respond immediately to the apparent injured person. Do not attempt to move the injured person unless they are in immediate danger. If a serious injury is suspected, contact emergency medical services.
- Promptly notify appropriate management personnel and document the event (regardless of injury severity) immediately or within 24 hours and report the incident to your insurance carrier to initiate claim resolution and possible legal defense measures.
- Gather and document all relevant information and evidence, including the injured person's and witness statements, date/time of fall, environmental conditions at the time of the fall, photos, video images and CCTV footage (if available).
- Conduct a comprehensive root cause analysis to determine responsible and contributing factors and develop suggested corrective actions to help prevent future recurrence.

Preventing falls by employees or other walkers is a challenging task. Employers and owners/operators of public spaces with a prior frequency of slip-trip-fall incidents must be willing to consider undoing their passive approaches to prevent these incidents and move toward a more robust strategy of proactive interventions and behavioral modification wherever possible to eliminate and mitigate slip and trip hazards. Even incremental implementation of selected engineering, administrative or behavioral measures will create tangible and quantifiable improvement and reduction of these preventable injuries.





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