

Safety News



Slips, Trips, and Falls: Boring Everyday Accidents?

Slips, trips, and falls are among the most common workplace accidents, and they cause a lot of very costly--and painful--injuries every year. Are you doing all you can to prevent them?

Everyone reading this has certainly slipped, tripped, or fallen at least once. More likely, you've had several falls during your lifetime. Fortunately, many such accidents are minor. But some can be serious--such as falls from ladders or other high places.

So while it's certainly true to say that workers slip, trip, and fall on the job practically every day, it's certainly not accurate to characterize these incidents as "boring." You and your workers should be intensely interested in eliminating slips, trips, and falls.

Common and Costly

It may surprise you to learn that falls account for about 15 percent of all work-related injuries. Each year hundreds of workers die and thousands become disabled from falls on the job. In fact, these incidents are second only to lower back pain and lifting injuries in the number of workers' comp claims filed. And they cost you and other employers a fortune.

Why Do We Fall?

The consensus among safety professionals is that almost all falls can be prevented. It's simply a matter of learning how to recognize fall hazards and making the effort to avoid them.

When you fall, you lose your balance and footing. Your center of gravity is displaced and the fall is inevitable. You may be thrown off balance by slipping on a wet floor or tripping over an object in your way. Once you lose your footing and support, there's no place to go but down.

Falls often occur at ground level because of slippery surfaces caused by grease, water, or ice. Even if you have a sturdy, slip-resistant floor, a slight contamination from dust, water, grease or metal shavings can make the surface slippery. The use of inappropriate footwear, poor lighting, and obstacles in walkways and on stairs can also contribute to slips, trips, and falls.

Another common fall hazard is the unsafe or incorrect use of ladders. Climbing on chairs, boxes, or shelving to access higher levels is a very unsafe work practice that often leads to injury.

Even in the supposedly safe environment of an office, falls are the most common type of injury. Tripping over an open desk or file drawer is one frequent hazard. Falls can also occur when an office worker bends down to reach something while seated in an unstable chair. Tripping over electrical cords is another typical office fall.

What Can You Do?

Here are four simple but very effective steps you can take to eliminate slip, trip, and fall hazards.

1. Make tripping and fall hazards a major part of your regular safety inspections. Include these items in your daily and weekly inspection checklists. Also encourage your workers to report any slip, trip, and fall hazards they identify.
2. Review accident reports to determine the causes of slips, trips, and falls. Don't fall into the trap of just blaming "carelessness." One supervisor did just that at American Airlines when a cargo handler slipped on a worn tread as he was descending from the cab of a ramp cargo vehicle and broke his ankle. The supervisor was admonished by the safety department for writing down "Told to be careful" as the corrective action, when the real cause of the accident was the worn tread that should have been reported and replaced.
3. Put up safety posters warning about slip, trip, and fall hazards all around your facility as a constant reminder.
4. Provide slip, trip, and fall training for all workers.

Maybe it's time for you to devote a safety meeting or two to slip, trip, and fall hazards and precautions.

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