6 Guidelines to Prevent Workplace Slips, Trips, and Falls

It’s probably happened to most of us. A simple momentary lapse of inattention or a distraction that results in a slip, trip or fall. A stumble down a stairway. A trip over an uneven surface. Slipping on the a wet surface or on ice. It can lead to a variety of regrettable events ranging from a simple bruised knee to an extremely serious injury. It’s just one of a variety of conditions and situations that set the stage for slips, trips and falls in the workplace.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, slips, trips and falls make up the majority of general industry accidents, which account for:

- 15 percent of all accidental deaths per year, the second-leading cause behind motor vehicle accidents.
- About 25 percent of all reported injury claims per fiscal year.
- More than 95 million lost work days per year – about 65 percent of all work days lost.

In general, slips and trips occur due to a loss of traction between the shoe and the walking surface or an inadvertent contact with a fixed or moveable object which may lead to a fall. There are a variety of situations that may cause slips, trips and falls.

- Wet or greasy floors
- Dry floors with wood dust or powder
- Uneven walking surfaces
- Polished or freshly waxed floors
- Loose flooring, carpeting or mats
- Transition from one floor type to another
- Missing or uneven floor tiles and bricks
- Damaged steps
- Sloped walking surfaces
- Shoes with wet, muddy, greasy or oily soles
- Clutter
- Electrical cords or cables
- Open desk or file cabinet drawers
- Weather hazards – rain, hail, frost or ice
- Wet leaves, pine needles or other debris from bushes and trees

Here are six guidelines to help you create and maintain a safer working environment.

1. Use Good Housekeeping Practices

Good housekeeping is critical. Safety and housekeeping go hand-in-hand. If your areas housekeeping habits are poor, the result may be a higher incidence of slips, trips, and falls. If work spaces are noticeably clean and well organized, it is a good indication that overall safety is good.
Proper housekeeping is a routine. It is an ongoing procedure that is simply done as a part of each worker’s daily performance. To create an effective housekeeping program, there are three simple steps to get you started

- **Plan Ahead** – Know what needs to be done, who’s going to do it and what the particular work area should look like when you are done.
- **Assign Responsibilities** – It may be necessary to assign a specific person or group of workers to clean up, although personal responsibility for cleaning up after himself/herself is preferred.
- **Implement a Program** – Establish housekeeping procedures as a part of the daily routine.

2. **Be Aware of Wet or Slippery Surfaces**

Walking surfaces account for a significant portion of injuries reported by state agencies. The most frequently reported types of surfaces where these injuries occur include:

- Parking lots
- Sidewalks (or lack of)
- Food preparation areas
- Shower stalls in residential dorms
- Floors in general

Traction on outdoor surfaces can change considerably when weather conditions change. Those conditions can then affect indoor surfaces as moisture is tracked in by pedestrian traffic. Indoor control measures can help reduce the incidence of slips and falls.

- Clean up spills immediately. If spills cannot be cleaned up, isolate the area and contact Facilities Management Services at (530) 898-6222 immediately.
- Within your Department or area, create a procedure for taking the appropriate action when someone causes or comes across a food or drink spill.
- Use proper area rugs or mats for food preparation areas if needed.

3. **Avoid Creating Obstacles in Aisles and Walkways**

Injuries can also result in from trips caused by obstacles, clutter, materials and equipment in aisles, corridors, entranceways and stairwells. Proper housekeeping in work and traffic areas is still the most effective control measure in avoiding the proliferation of these types of hazards. This means having policies or procedures in place and allowing time for cleaning the area, especially where scrap material or waste is a by-product of the work operation.

- Keep all work areas, passageways, storerooms and service areas clean and orderly.
- Avoid stringing cords, cables or air hoses across hallways or in any designated aisle.
- In office areas, avoid leaving boxes, files or briefcases in the aisles.
- Encourage safe work practices such as closing file cabinet drawers after use and picking up loose items from the floor.
- Conduct periodic inspections for slip and trip hazards, correct or report hazards.
4. **Create and Maintain Proper Lighting**

Poor lighting in the workplace is associated with an increase in accidents.

- Use proper illumination in walkways, staircases, ramps, and hallways.
- Keep work areas well lit and clean.
- Upon entering a darkened room, always turn on the light first.
- Keep all walkways clear of clutter and obstructions.
- Keep areas around light switches clear and accessible.
- Report fixtures, switches and cords immediately to FMS if they malfunction.

5. **Wear Proper Shoes**

The shoes we wear can play a big part in preventing falls. The slickness of the soles and the type of heels worn need to be evaluated to avoid slips, trips and falls. Shoelaces need to be tied correctly. Whenever a fall-related injury is investigated, the footwear needs to be evaluated to see if it contributed to the incident. Employees are expected to wear footwear appropriate for the duties of their work task.

6. **Control Individual Behavior**

This condition is the toughest to control. It is human nature to let our guard down for two seconds and be distracted by random thoughts or doing multiple activities. Being in a hurry will result in walking too fast or running which increases the chances of a slip, trip or fall. Taking shortcuts, not watching where one is going, using a cell phone, carrying materials which obstructs the vision, wearing sunglasses in low-light areas, not using designated walkways and speed are common elements in many on-the-job injuries.

It's ultimately up to each individual to plan, stay alert and pay attention.

Please report slip, trip, and fall hazards to Facilities Management Services (FMS) at 898-6222

or contact the Department of Environmental Health and Safety at 898-5126