

How to Prevent Slip, Trip and Fall Accidents

First of all, it's important to understand that the vast majority of slips and falls occur because the person is not paying attention to where they are walking or what they're doing and they either trip on something or the floor surface is slippery. We can describe slips and falls as a dual cause accident. We say dual because there may be two causes. First, the person wasn't paying attention.

The second cause could be a slippery floor, an electrical cord that shouldn't have been there or a number of other potential hazards. To reduce about 90 percent of slips and falls, just pay attention to what you're doing and be aware of your walking or sitting surfaces or positions and you'll eliminate slips and falls.

Causes of Slip, Trip and Fall Accidents

Let's look at the other 10 percent and we'll call these physical hazards that can cause slips and falls.

The first step is to have a good maintenance program to keep the outside walking surfaces in good condition. A consistent sweeping program with either a push sweeper or mechanical sweeper can reduce the level of dirt, grit or sand in the parking lot and around entrances.

Cleaning is a fundamental safety measure to help reduce slippery walking surfaces, but it's also very important to reduce the amount of dirt, sand, ice and snow from being carried inside the building. On the inside of the building, the first 15 to 25 feet from the entrance are the most important. This is where any dirt or other debris is carried into the building from the bottom of your shoes. Walk off mats are recommended at the entrances to help clean your shoes as you walk inside. These mats wipe off dirt and moisture, which reduces the slippery shoe surfaces from the outside dirt. These mats should be about 15 to 25 feet long and should be wide enough to accommodate everyone walking through. Next, frequent cleaning of the walk off mat is critical.

Naturally, all walking surfaces must be kept clean. Think about the equipment that rolls over the same floor on which you walk. Forklifts, hand truck and other equipment can have grease, oil, solvent and other debris on their tires and can make walking surfaces very slippery.

Floor maintenance is very important, but it's everyone's responsibility. **If you see a spill, clean it up.** If you can't do the job, be sure to warn others and report it so it can be cleaned up as quickly as possible. If you notice a potential slip and fall hazard, report it to your supervisor. That hazard may have been there for over a year and you walk past it everyday, assuming that someone will take care of it. Well, don't wait... report it so it can be corrected.

Clean up spills when they occur. You'll notice sticky parts of the floor around soda machines. That's because someone spilled a liquid and no one bothered to clean it up.

We're not trying to make maintenance persons out of everyone, just some basic information to help you understand what it takes to keep floor surfaces free of slip and fall hazards. It requires your assistance.

Stair Safety- When you walk up or down stairs, hold the hand rail. In case you slip or trip, the hand on the rail will help prevent you from falling. This has been a safety habit since stairs were first introduced. There are some hazards associated with stairs. Torn carpeting, damaged tread nosing, oily treads and dirty stairs. Keep in mind that your shoes should be clean and non-slippery when walking up or down stairs. If your stairs need some attention, report it to your supervisor.

Ladder Safety- Next, falls from ladders can be quite serious. Broken or damaged rungs can cause falls, but more than likely it will be greasy or slippery shoes. Also, a person will stand on the ladder improperly, or stand on the top two steps, which will create a stability problem. Never stand on the top two rungs of any step ladder. Never lean past your belt buckle. When you lean too far from the edge of any ladder, the center of gravity shifts and the next thing you know.... there will be an accident.

Getting into and out of vehicles- Never jump from trucks or other vehicles or equipment. Most non-driving truck driver injuries result from getting into or out of their truck. They either don't hold onto handrails or they jump off their truck.

Proper footwear can also help reduce slips and falls. High heels, certain leather on the soles of shoes, even the popular tennis shoes can be very slippery on some surfaces. This is particularly true if your shoes have any grease, oil or other residue on them.

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Walk only in authorized walking areas. Walking over conveyors can cause a slip or fall. Watch for wet or slippery surfaces. Don't walk over boxes, pallets or other materials.... use the proper walk way. Think about the walking surface on which you're walking. If you're walking on a carpeted surface that will change to tile or concrete, be aware that different floor surfaces will have a different level of friction. The carpet will have good friction, but the tile or concrete will be slippery compared to the carpet. If you're aware of the difference, you'll make the necessary adjustments to prevent a fall.

Don't forget about telephone wires, electrical cords and other things that can cause a trip. Even in office, open file drawers can cause trip hazards.

If you read any textbook on safety, the three E's are mentioned. **Engineering, Education and Enforcement.** Engineering is correcting potential physical hazards or making your facility as free of defects as possible. Education is making sure that everyone is aware of safety and everyone is trained in accident prevention. In the case of slips and falls, it means paying attention to where you walk so slips and falls won't occur. The Enforcement part of the equation means your company has safety rules and they are enforced. It's pretty simple. Engineering, Education and Enforcement. Words to live by.

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