

# Preventing Slips, Trips and Falls

## Statistics

- Falls account for more than 8.7 million emergency room visits each year in the United States according to the National Safety Council.
- Statistics show that the majority (66%) of falls happen on the same level ("fall on same level") resulting from slips and trips. The remaining 34% are falls from a height.
- Slips, trips and falls account for 15 percent of all accidental deaths per year, the second-leading cause behind motor vehicles.
- They also account for about 25 percent of all reported injury claims per fiscal year and more than 95 million lost work days per year – about 65 percent of all work days lost.

## Slips

Slips happen where there is too little friction or traction between the footwear and the walking surface. Common causes of slips are:

- Wet, greasy or oily surfaces
- Occasional spills
- Weather hazards
- Loose flooring or carpeting; unanchored rugs or mats
- Flooring or other walking surfaces that do not have the same degree of traction in all areas
- Transition from one floor type to another
- Dry floors with wood dust or powder
- Polished or freshly waxed floors
- Sloped walking surfaces
- Shoes with wet, muddy, greasy or oily soles
- Clutter
- Electrical cords or cables



## Trips

Trips happen when your foot collides (strikes, hits) an object causing you to lose your balance and eventually fall. Common causes of tripping are:

- Obstructed view
- Poor lighting
- Clutter in your way
- Wrinkled carpeting
- Uncovered cables
- Desk or file cabinet drawers left open
- Shoes with wet, muddy, greasy or oily soles
- Missing or uneven floor tiles and bricks
- Damaged or irregular steps; no handrails



## How to prevent falls due to slips and trips?

Both slips and trips result from some a kind of unintended or unexpected change in the contact between the feet and the ground or walking surface. This shows that good housekeeping, quality of walking surfaces (flooring), selection of proper footwear, and appropriate pace of walking are critical for preventing fall accidents.

## Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is the first and the most important (fundamental) level of preventing falls due to slips and trips. It includes:

- Cleaning all spills immediately
- Marking spills and wet areas
- Mopping or sweeping debris from floors

- Removing obstacles from walkways and always keeping them free of clutter
- Securing (tacking, taping, etc.) mats, rugs and carpets that do not lay flat
- Always closing file cabinet or storage drawers
- Covering cables that cross walkways
- Keeping working areas and walkways well lit
- Replacing used light bulbs and faulty switches

Good housekeeping is critical. Safety and housekeeping go hand-in-hand. If your facility's housekeeping habits are poor, the result may be a higher incidence of employee injuries, ever-increasing insurance costs and regulatory citations. If an organization's facilities are noticeably clean and well organized, it is a good indication that its overall safety program is effective as well.

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:

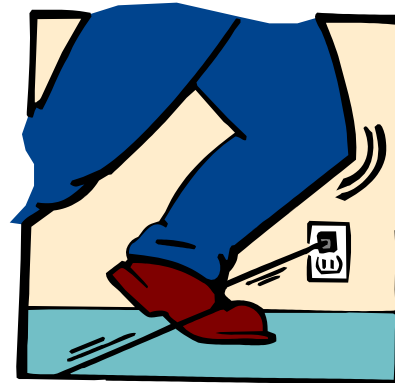
1. Plan ahead- Know what needs to be done, who's going to do it and what the particular work area should look like when you are done.
2. Assign responsibilities- It may be necessary to assign a specific person or group of workers to clean up, although personal responsibility for cleaning up after oneself is preferred.
3. Implement a program- Establish housekeeping procedures as a part of the daily routine.



### Wet or Slippery Surfaces

Walking surfaces account for a significant portion of injuries. The following measures can help reduce accidents on wet or slippery surfaces:

- 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. Traction control procedures should be constantly monitored for their effectiveness.
- Keep parking lots and sidewalks clean and in good repair condition.
- Use adhesive striping material or anti-skid paint whenever possible; Use anti-skid adhesive tape in troublesome areas.
- Indoor control measures can help reduce the incidence of slips and falls.
- Use moisture-absorbent mats with beveled edges in entrance areas. Make sure they have backing material that will not slide on the floor.
- Display "Wet Floor" signs as needed.
- Clean up spills immediately. 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.



### 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.



## Lighting

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

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



## Footwear

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 tasks.

## 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.

