Slips and Trips Safety Talk

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Slips, trips and same-level falls 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, selection of proper footwear, and appropriate pace of walking are critical for preventing accidents.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

COMMON SLIPS, TRIPS HAZARDS

Most slips and trips are caused by:

- poor lighting.
- trailing cables.
- unsuitable floor coverings.
- uneven or damaged floor surfaces.
- contaminated floor surfaces, for example liquid or grease.
- poor housekeeping, for example tripping or falling over something left in a walk way.

Slips

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

- wet or oily surfaces
- occasional spills
- weather hazards
- loose, unanchored rugs or mats
- flooring or other walking surfaces that do not have same degree of traction in all areas

Trips

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

- obstructed view
- poor lighting
- clutter in your way
- wrinkled carpeting
- uncovered cables
- bottom drawers not being closed
- uneven (steps, thresholds) walking surfaces

The “Downtime” Factor

How this hazard can affect your business

- Each year there are about 17,000 lost-time injuries due to falls in the workplace
- 65% of all fall-related injuries are from “same level”
- One in five lost-time injuries result from falls
- Every year about 20 people die in Ontario because of workplace falls
- 80 workers are injured every day because of a fall – that’s one every 20 minutes
- An average WSIB claim is $11,771; factor in other costs like lost productivity and staff replacement, and the cost can be as much as four times more – approximately $59,000 per injury
- with a profit margin of 5%, sales/services required to cover the total cost of one injury equals about $1.2 million

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Slips and trips are among the most common causes of injuries in the workplace, they are also among the most easily preventable. They need not occur with such staggering frequency. But they do because many managers, supervisors and workers are not mindful or aware of where incidents are likely to happen and cause injuries.

PREVENTION – GUIDELINES

1. **Create Good Housekeeping Practices**

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

- **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. **Reduce 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. Traction control procedures should be constantly monitored for their effectiveness.

- Keep parking lots and sidewalks clean and in good repair condition.
- When snow and ice are present, remove or treat these elements. In some extreme cases, it may be necessary to suspend use of the area.
- Use adhesive striping material or anti-skid paint whenever possible.

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.
- Use anti-skid adhesive tape in troublesome areas.
- 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

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.

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, 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.

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.

What Employers Can Do for Safety's Sake

- Have a company policy in place that clearly outlines the rules for housekeeping, lighting and inspections.
- Ensure that required personal protective equipment, and other equipment, is in good repair and used properly.
- Assist supervisors in meeting their obligation to ensure the rules are followed.
- Provide proper training to workers on how to clean up spills, the proper use of fall protection equipment, the use of proper guard rails and covers over holes, etc.
- Provide continuous follow-up to make sure that the rules are adequate and are being followed, and to identify what needs improvement.
- Investigate all incidents to determine how to eliminate the cause.
- Learn how to inspect, setup and safely use ladders – on and off the job.

What Employees Can Do for Safety's Sake

- taking your time and paying attention to where you are going.
- adjusting your stride to a pace that is suitable for the walking surface and the tasks you are doing.
- walking with the feet pointed slightly outward.
- making wide turns at corners.

Reduce the risk of tripping by:

- keeping walking areas clear from clutter or obstructions.
- keeping flooring in good condition.
- always using installed light sources that provide sufficient light for your tasks.
- using a flashlight if you enter a dark room where there is no light.
- making sure that things you are carrying or pushing do not prevent you from seeing any obstructions, spills, etc.

Slips, Trips Takeaway

There are three things that workplace managers, front-line supervisors and workers should do to eliminate, reduce and avoid totally preventable “incidents” by:

- **understand how accidents happen**
- **identify the trouble area**
- **eliminate or minimize**

FINAL WORD

Slips and trips are leading causes of injuries in any workplace. Injuries such as a rolled ankle usually aren’t very serious but can take away from productivity. Sometimes, slips or trips can lead to falls. Depending on the circumstances, these falls can prove to be fatal. Preventing slips and trips involve a small amount of effort.