

TRAINING MODULE: SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

The act of walking has potential hazards, however since it is such a familiar part of our daily lives, many of us tend to overlook them. According to the U. S. Department of Labor, slips, trips and falls are the second leading cause of death, following motor vehicle accidents. Slips occur when you are walking and there is a loss of traction (the force that allows you to walk without slipping) between your shoe and the walking surface. Trips occur when you are walking and the front of your foot strikes an object and is suddenly stopped. Both a slip and a trip can cause you to fall.

PREVENTION OF SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS ON THE SAME LEVEL

Slips, trips and falls may occur on the same level (floor level) or from a different level. The majority, however, occur on floor level and not from high places.

HOUSEKEEPING

Good housekeeping activities such as picking up, wiping up, and cleaning up can greatly decrease the risk of slips, trips and falls. Although these activities are routinely assigned to environmental services or housekeeping personnel, like "safety" itself, it is everyone's responsibility. Each employee should do his/her part to keep the work area clean.

WET OR SLIPPERY SURFACES

The traction on outdoor surfaces can quickly change due to environmental factors such as rain or snow. Use caution when walking on these surfaces. Moisture, and liquid, food, grease and oil spills cause hazardous indoor walking conditions. Floors must be kept clean and dry. To prevent or decrease slips and falls resulting from wet or slippery indoor surfaces:

- Immediately clean up food, liquid, grease, or oil spills (regardless of size) or report the spill to appropriate personnel if you not authorized to clean it up. When cleaning the spill, avoid getting any more area than necessary wet.
- Do not wait for a spill to dry itself.
- Display wet floor caution signs or use safety cones to advise others to avoid the area. You may need to post a sign that shows another route around the area. Once the hazard has been resolved the sign should be removed. If not, the sign may become commonplace and lose its effectiveness.
- Place absorbent mats in entrance areas when moisture from environmental factors such as rain or snow may be tracked inside by others. Please note, however, that improper mats can become tripping hazards. Floor mats should have beveled edges, lie flat on the floor, and be made out of material or contain a backing that will not slide on the floor.
- Place appropriate rugs, mats, or other non-slip surfaces in food preparation areas and bathing facilities.

Be advised that highly polished floors such as ceramic tile can be extremely slippery when wet.

OBSTACLES

Trips due to obstacles can result in significant injuries. To prevent or decrease trips and falls resulting from obstacles:

- Keep work areas, aisles, passageways, stairs and exits clean and clear.
- Do not string cords or lines across hallways or in any walkway.
- Use safe work practices such as closing file cabinet drawers after use and picking up and storing loose items from the floor. Even the smallest object such as a pencil should be immediately picked up to keep the work area clean and clear.
- If an obstacle is in your way, move it or walk around it, do not climb over it.

LIGHTING

Poor lighting can hide obstacles and wet or slippery surfaces, therefore work areas should be well lit. Proper illumination is used in walkways, stairways, and hallways to help individuals avoid slips, trips, and falls. If you find an area that is not well lit or a light bulb that needs to be replaced, complete a work order and/or contact the appropriate personnel within your organization.

FOOTWEAR

Prevent or decrease slips and falls by wearing shoes with nonskid soles. High heels, slides, and open toe shoes create the greatest risk of falling. You are expected to wear footwear appropriate for the duties of your job. The hems and cuffs of your clothes should also be short enough to reduce the risk of catching your heel while walking.

INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

The most common cause of slips, trips, and falls is not paying attention. A brief moment of not paying attention can lead to injury such as a bruise or a concussion or even death. It is important that you stay alert and plan ahead. Lack of planning may cause you to get behind, triggering you to hurry, walk too fast or focus on a task at hand and become unaware of your surroundings. To prevent or decrease slips, trips, and falls - plan, stay alert, and pay attention.

PREVENTION OF SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS FROM DIFFERENT LEVELS

As previously mentioned, slips, trips and falls may occur from different levels. Falls from elevated surfaces are less frequent but, in most cases, more severe than same level falls.

UNEVEN SURFACES

Use caution when walking over uneven surfaces such as loose tiles, bricks, or pavement, or carpet that does not meet evenly with another surface. Report uneven surfaces to the appropriate personnel within your organization.

STAIRS

Nearly half of all falls occur on steps and stairways. To prevent or decrease your risk of falling on stairs:

- Plan, stay alert, and pay attention. Do not hurry.
- Use the handrail.
- Keep stairways well lit and clear of obstacles.
- Report ice and snow on stairs.
- Report worn or loose carpeting or chipped or torn stair tread.
- Carry loads that do not block your view of each step. This may result in several trips with smaller loads. However, smaller loads will also allow you to keep one hand free to hold onto the handrail.
- Make sure rugs positioned at the top or bottom of a stairway are securely fastened.
- Be aware of steps when entering or exiting a room or building.

LADDERS

You may be expected to use a ladder as a result of the duties of your job. In these situations, you must follow certain guidelines when placing, climbing, and coming down the ladder. The guidelines provided in this course apply to the safe use of a straight ladder, step-ladder or step-stool. Be advised, if a situation requires the use of a ladder, use one!

- Do not substitute with a chair, box, or other piece of furniture.
- You should always inspect the ladder first. It should be clean and in good condition. Use it only for its intended purpose. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines regarding maximum weight and always use the locking device.

- Choose the correct ladder length for the job. A step-stool is usually two feet high, a step-ladder is generally 8 feet and an extension-type straight ladder can be 16 feet or longer. A straight ladder should be long enough so that when it rests against the upper support the employee can work with their waist below the top rung or the rung at which the siderails are resting against the support. Never stand on the top three rungs of a straight ladder or the top two steps of a step-ladder.
- Only use ladders on stable, level, and dry surfaces. Do not place a ladder on make-shift objects such as a table or box. Keep the upper resting edge of a straight ladder on a firm foundation.
- Ladders should be set at a 4:1 angle. For each four feet of rise from the base to the upper resting edge of the ladder, the base should be one foot out from the upper resting edge of the ladder to the working surface.
- Face the ladder and use both hands to hold the siderails when going up or down. Be sure your shoes are not slippery before using a ladder.
- Carry small tools in a tool belt, not in your hands. Raise other tools and supplies with a rope.
- Never lean too far to the sides. Keep your belt buckle within the siderails.
- Never move or attempt to adjust a ladder while someone is on it.
- Never have more than one person on a ladder at a time.
- Never jump from a ladder. Always step down from the bottom rung.
- Do not use a metal ladder in locations in which it or its user could come into contact with electricity.

THE CORRECT WAY TO FALL

If you find yourself falling, do so correctly to reduce your risk of injury:

- Tuck your chin in, turn your head, and throw an arm up. It is better to land on your arm than on your head.
- While falling, twist or roll your body to the side. It is better to land on your buttocks and side than on your back.
- Keep your wrists, elbows and knees bent. Do not try to break the fall with your hands or elbows. When falling, you want to have as many square inches of your body as possible contact the surface at the same time, thus, spreading out the impact of the fall.

REPORTING

All slips, trips and falls, with or without injury, should be reported, recorded and reviewed. Action to prevent a repeat occurrence should be taken immediately. To report a slip, trip or fall, contact the appropriate personnel within your organization.