



5 minute safety talk

Slips, Trips & Falls

In 2015, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported over 223,000 non-fatal falls on the job. The majority of those falls—149,180—were not from a height or elevation. These workers fell on the same level due to slipping on a slick surface or from tripping over a hazard in the work area. Many of these incidents resulted in missed work days and injuries including fractures, sprains and strain tears, according to 2016 *Injury Facts*[®], the statistical report on unintentional injuries by the National Safety Council. Due to underreporting, the number could be even higher.

Distractions and hazards

Slips, trips and falls are the No. 2 cause of nonfatal disabling injury in the workplace following overexertion. Fortunately, by being aware of our surroundings, slips, trips and falls are easily preventable. It starts with awareness. We're always on the move so it can become second-nature to go into autopilot when

walking, especially in familiar places like the workplace. Take a moment to acknowledge the area you're walking through, even if you walk through it every day. Has anything changed? Is there a new potential hazard, such as a slippery floor or a stack of boxes, that wasn't there yesterday?

Distraction is another factor we don't always recognize. Eating on the go, rushing to a meeting and using the phone—whether it's talking, checking a work email or getting the latest score from the game—are all distractions that increase the risk of a trip or fall. Don't rush and focus on getting to your destination safely.

Other hazards include:

- Wet floors
- Uneven surfaces (tile, carpet, etc.)
- Ice, which can often be difficult to see
- Limited visibility around corners
- Cluttered work areas
- Not using the handrail in stairways
- Cords across pathways
- Carrying a load that's too heavy and/or obstructs vision

Don't forget to report hazards and falls

An important step in preventing slips, trips and falls from happening in the future is reporting them when they occur. Some employees may feel embarrassment or even fear retribution for reporting an incident. New employees—workers with less than one year of service—disproportionately account for 30% of non-fatal injuries from falls. An employer shouldn't place blame on any employee who falls, especially since some falls are related to a person's physical ability. In fact, many causes of slips, trips and falls can be prevented by employers, but employees—who are most familiar with their work areas—are best suited to identify and report hazards.

Employers need to make safety a part of their culture and encourage reporting of all hazards, no matter how minor they seem. This is the best way to prevent incidents before they happen.

Focus on problem areas

Concentrate on the areas where the most incidents occur:

- Doorways/entry ways
- Ramps
- Cluttered hallways
- Heavy traffic areas
- Uneven surfaces
- Areas prone to wetness and spills

Always ensure that floors are clean, well-maintained and fitted with slip-resistant material when necessary. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) also recommends workers wear slip-resistant footwear.

Getting everyone on-board

Making sure the work environment is free of hazards and properly maintained is important in preventing slips, trips and falls, but it is only part of the solution. Commitment to a safe environment including communication between managers and their workers is a critical component. Training will teach employees to make sure work areas are clear and clean and any potential hazards are identified with proper signage. Encourage employees to make behavioral changes to reduce the risk of falls: be attentive, don't carry heavy loads and keep work areas clutter-free. Companies that create a safe working environment along with a strong, focused safety culture usually see incident rates decline.