

SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS

TALKING POINTS

Slips, Trips and Falls are a major cause of injury

Slips, trips, and falls cause many workplace accidents, many of them very painful, as well as numerous accidental deaths. In fact, they cause more fatalities than all other accident causes but motor vehicles.

You can fall when standing, working on a ladder, or even sitting in a chair. But most falls occur while walking. Causes may include oil or water spilled on a floor, losing your footing on stairs or a gravel path, a slippery parking lot or a wet floor, or tripping over a loose wire.

.What are the differences between Slips, Trips and Falls?

Slips occur when one skids or loses footing due to contact with a substance or unstable surface underfoot.

Trips are caused by the foot or lower leg hitting an object while the upper body continues moving, resulting in loss of balance.

Falls occur when someone is too far off center of balance. This results in a descent to the floor, into or against an object, or to a surface at a lower level. Even a "near fall" can cause injury due to muscle strain, as the body works to keep itself from falling.

What Causes Slipping?

Slips are caused by skidding or losing footing due to contact with a substance or unstable surface beneath your feet, such as water, dusts, or grease. OSHA defines it as too little friction or traction between the feet and the floor, resulting in loss of balance. There are many causes. Highly-polished floors, such as marble, ceramic tile, or freshly-waxed surfaces can be slick even when dry. Also, substances like water, mud, snow, grease, oil or spilled food can cause slipping.

These walking surfaces can be hazardous, especially if you are not careful:

- Rough ground
- Oily or painted concrete
- Smooth wet floors
- Gravel
- Carpets and rugs

Other causes of slipping are transitioning from one surface to another, such as carpet to vinyl floors, or metal grid to smooth concrete. Sloped walking surfaces, loose or

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unanchored rugs or mats, loose floorboards, shifting tiles, and ramps or gangplanks without skid or slip-resistant surfaces can cause slipping. Workers have also slipped while mounting and dismounting vehicles or equipment, climbing ladders, or walking on loose, irregular surfaces such as gravel.

What Causes Trips?

Trips are caused by the foot or lower leg hitting an object while the upper body continues moving, resulting in loss of balance (and sometimes falls). Trips can also occur when stepping down to a lower surface and losing balance. Other causes are coming in to contact with uncovered hoses, cables, wires or cords across aisles or walkways, clutter, obstacles in aisles and work areas, and hazards like open cabinet, file or desk drawers and doors.

Other common tripping hazards include changes in elevation; unmarked steps or ramps; creased or rolled-up carpets and mats or carpets with curled edges; irregularities in walking surfaces like thresholds or gaps; and missing or uneven floor tiles and bricks.

Steps can cause problems. Damaged steps, non-uniform, improper or irregular steps – such as taller or shorter risers, or steps with shallower tread depth, can be dangerous. Sidewalk/curb drops, speed bumps, wheelchair ramps and curbs, and otherwise irregular walking surfaces all can cause tripping.

Environmental Conditions That Increase the Risk of Trips & Slips

- Poor lighting
- Glare and shadows
- Poor housekeeping
- Improper cleaning methods and products
- Inadequate or missing signage/warning signs.

Personal Factors That Increase the Risk of Trips & Slips

Sometimes a worker may be carrying or moving cumbersome objects, or simply too many objects at one time. This can lead to slipping or tripping, especially if their vision is blocked. Other causes include not paying attention to surroundings or walking while distracted, taking unapproved shortcuts, and generally being in a hurry and rushing.

A worker's physical condition can make them more likely to fall. Workers should recognize whether they have the following conditions, and take appropriate measures to be safe:

- Failing eyesight or visual perception
- Advanced age and/or poor physical condition

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- Fatigue, stress or illness
- Taking certain prescription or over-the counter medications
- Using alcohol or drugs

What Causes Falls?

Slipping and tripping are key causes, along with working at heights without fall protection. Many falls occur when you are too far off the center of balance. This results in landing on or below the floor, or striking into or against an object.

Types of falls: Generally, there are two types of falls: at the same level and to a lower level.

- Fall at same level: Fall to same walking or working surface or fall into or against objects above same surface.
- Fall to lower level: Fall to level below the walking or working surface.

What kinds of injuries occur?

Slips, trips – and especially falls – often cause sprains & strains, bruises & contusions, fractures, abrasions and lacerations. Common injuries involve knee, ankle and foot, wrist, elbow, backs, shoulders, hip, and the head.

How can Slips, Trips and Falls be prevented?

- Keep all areas clean and orderly and in a sanitary condition.
- Keep floors clean and dry.
- Keep passageways clear and in good repair with no obstruction across, or in, aisles.
- Provide floor plugs for equipment, so power cords need not run across pathways.
- Provide warning signs for wet floor areas.
- Keep exits, and access to exits, free from obstruction.
- Provide adequate lighting.
- Repair any uneven floor surfaces.
- Relay or stretch carpets that bulge or have become bunched to prevent tripping.
- Use non-skid waxes and surfaces coated with grit to create non-slip surfaces.
- Use non-slip mats.

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When making area surveys, note the following conditions and employee actions:

- Is the floor clean and level? Is it dry? If you are carrying something, can you see where you are going?
- Is carpeting torn, bulging or bunched?
- Do area rugs or mats have non-slip backings?
- Do highly-polished floors become slippery when wet?
- Are there any “wet floor” warning signs?
- Are aisles and passageways clear?
- Do stairs have hand railings?
- Are ladders used safely?
- Is snow, ice or rainwater removed promptly?
- Is lighting adequate in all work areas, halls and stairways?
- Do employees wear appropriate footwear?