

Slips, trips and falls prevention guidelines



Why is the prevention of slips, trips and falls important?

Every year thousands of people become injured due to accidental falls at work or in public places. Most falls happen because of slips or trips. Fewer falls, but no less serious, occur from heights. Serious injury and sometimes death are a result of these accidents. The following document provides information about “falls on the same level” (slips and trips).

Falls from level surfaces are avoidable. The information below will detail how falls happen, identifying the trouble areas and eliminating or minimizing hazards of falling.

How and why do falls happen?

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
- Liquid spilled on the floor or walking surface
- Hazards due to weather
- Mats or rugs that are loose
- Floors or other walking surfaces that do not have the same degree of traction in all areas
- Improper footwear

Trips

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

- Obstructed views
- Poor lighting
- Items located in your path
- Uneven or wrinkled carpeting
- Cables or electrical cords that are uncovered or stick up
- Drawers not being closed
- Uneven walking surfaces such as steps, sidewalks, thresholds, etc.

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How to prevent falls due to slips and trips

Both slips and trips result from an unexpected change in the contact between the feet and the walking surface. Good housekeeping, adequate lighting, quality of walking surfaces, selection of proper footwear and appropriate pace of walking are critical for preventing accidental falls.

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is essential and the most important area for preventing falls due to slips and trips. It includes:

- Cleaning all spills immediately
- Marking spills and wet areas with wet floor signs or other methods
- Sweeping debris from floors
- Clearing walkways and always keeping them free of clutter
- Securing mats, rugs and carpets that do not lay flat
- Closing file cabinet or storage drawers
- Covering cables or cords that cross walkways
- Keeping work and public areas and walkways well lit
- Replacing used light bulbs and faulty switches

Flooring

Modifications or changes in walking surfaces is the next level of preventing slip and trips, but is not always practical. Improve safety and reduce the risk of falling with these techniques:

- Recoating or replacing floors
- Installing mats
- Installing pressure-sensitive abrasive strips or abrasive-filled paint-on coating
- Installing metal or synthetic decking

However, it is critical to remember that any flooring surface will still require good housekeeping.

Footwear

It is impossible to control the footwear of the general public who may enter your facility. This makes it extremely important to maintain all walking surfaces.

In workplaces where floors may be oily or wet or where workers spend considerable time outdoors, prevention of accidental falls should focus on selecting proper footwear. Since there is no footwear with anti-slip properties for every condition, consultation with manufacturers is highly recommended.

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How to prevent falls at work

It is important to remember that safety is everyone's business. However, it is the employer's responsibility to provide a safe work environment for all employees. Employees can also improve their own safety.

Employees can reduce the risk of slipping on wet flooring by:

- Taking their time and paying attention to where they are going
- Reviewing the path of travel before use when carrying items
- Adjusting their stride to a pace that is suitable for the walking surface and the tasks they are doing
- Walking with their feet pointed slightly outward
- Making wide turns at corners

Employees can reduce the risk of tripping by:

- Always using installed light sources that provide sufficient light for their tasks
- Using a flashlight if they enter a dark room
- Ensuring that things they are carrying or pushing do not prevent them from seeing any obstructions, spills, etc.

What if a slip, trip or accidental fall occurs?

An accident investigation should be completed as soon as possible after a slip, trip or accidental fall occurs. For your assistance, United Fire Group (UFG) offers a separate Slips, Trips and Falls Safety Prevention Safety Checklist (LC-7121) and a Slips, Trips and Falls Accident Investigation Procedure form (LC-7134). Please contact your UFG risk control consultant if assistance is needed in the development of your slips, trips and falls prevention program.

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