

Slips, Trips and Falls *oh my!*

In the U.S., there are more than 8.7 million people injured from slip, trip and fall incidents every year, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

Your church is probably the last place you would think of as a dangerous environment. Yet, our church homes are full of potential hazards for our congregants. These hazards come in a variety of forms, including: steps and stairwells, slippery parking lots or walkways, sidewalks in disrepair, or simply transitioning from one surface to another. Group these obstacles with physical ailments (failing eyesight, balance issues, and physical frailty), and you have a recipe for disaster.

Unfortunately for churches, injuries from slips and falls are consistently in the top three reasons churches go to court every year. The good news is that slips, trips, and falls are largely preventable through inspections and preventive maintenance. Regular walk-throughs should be conducted to make sure property is kept in good condition. In order to provide a safe place for guests, consider the most common causes of slips and falls and evaluate what you could do at your church to reduce the likelihood that someone will get injured at your facility for something that could have easily been prevented.

Visit InsuranceBoard.org for more information on ways to keep your congregation safe.

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Foreign substance - on the surface and adversely affect slip resistance. Most likely culprits are: ice, water, liquids, and grease. Check entrances, and keep them clean and dry.

Surface conditions - raised/recessed/cracked sidewalks or curbing, potholes in parking lots, loose carpeting, loose or broken tiles, holes on the surface. Make the repairs as soon as the issue is identified.

Level changes - floor or exterior walking surface height changes. Ramps used for persons with disabilities should have a slope no greater than 1:12 rise/run or 4.8 degrees with new construction or updates. Additional items to consider include non-uniform steps or stairs and curbing that is too high. Six-inch curbs are the standard for most jurisdictions.

Obstructions - items that can contribute to the likelihood of a trip and fall by impeding into a walking path: cords, hoses, parking lot bumpers, speed bumps and temporary storage areas. Your best bet is to remove obstructions as soon as they are identified.

Visibility - more than just lighting (how easy the surface is to see). Other considerations include glare, shadows, bright lights, and color contrasts.

Human factors - demographics (i.e., age), shoe types, familiarity with the areas traveled, and physically challenged persons.

Stairs - more than three steps (a major source of falls). Typically result in serious injury and most often occur while descending. Ensure handrails are secure and easily grasped. Stair treads should be slip resistant, well maintained and free of defects.

Unusual features - anything that might distract a person walking through the area: alarms/buzzers, flashing lights, high pedestrian and vehicle traffic, signs, information boards, displays, large windows, and decorative lighting.