

PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

Many workers are injured annually due to falls on walking and working surfaces. These injuries account for a significant percentage of lost-time injuries. Not only are slips, trips, and falls an economical loss, they also account for a lot of pain and suffering and sometimes even death. It is important to understand how slips, trips, and falls happen, how to identify hazards, and how to eliminate or minimize these hazards.

Slips

Slips happen because of a lack of friction or traction between the footwear we are wearing and the walking surface. Some common causes of slips are:

- Spills
- Hazards created from weather (e.g., puddles, ice)
- Surfaces that are wet or oily
- Loose rugs or mats

Trips

Trips occur when your foot strikes or hits an object which causes you to lose your balance. Common causes of tripping are:

- Clutter on the floor (e.g., power cords, boxes)
- Poor lighting
- Uneven walking surfaces (e.g., carpeting, steps, thresholds)
- Sudden change in slip resistance properties of walking surfaces (e.g., wet floor or stepping from tiled to thick pile carpeted floors)

Falls

Falls can occur from a height or on surfaces that are on the same level. A fall can be the result of a slip or a trip where your centre of gravity is shifted causing you to lose your balance. Preventive measures should be taken to avoid slips and trips.



PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls

When there is an unexpected change in the contact between your feet and the ground or walking surface, the result is usually a slip or trip. This demonstrates the importance of training and educating employees about the hazards, selecting suitable walking surfaces, having proper housekeeping standards, and wearing proper footwear to prevent falls. Here are a few different methods of controlling hazards leading to slips, trips, and falls.

Training and Education

It is very important that all workers and employers be trained on recognizing hazards related to slips, trips, and falls in their workplace. Many workers are not aware that they can contribute to the risks of a slip, trip and fall hazard through typical work tasks. A couple of examples of a worker creating hazards through work habits are:

- Leaving a mess behind after completing a task by not following workplace housekeeping standards after receiving training to do so
- Putting boxes in walkways, on the stairs, or in high traffic areas where there are designated storage spaces and racks

Workplace policies and worker behaviour have significant impact on the incidence of slips, trips and falls. Time pressures for completing tasks can cause behaviours such as rushing, not paying attention, and being unaware of hazards due to a lack of training can mistakenly be seen as carelessness. Workplaces should identify potentially dangerous hazards and behaviours and control or eliminate them through education and communication.

Workers and employers need to know how to properly identify, report, or eliminate any hazards that can be encountered in their work; this may require specific standards and training. For example:

- Employers should set good housekeeping standards, provide supervision, information, and training
- Workers should be trained on spill cleanup and proper disposal of spilled materials such as chemicals, oils, inks, coolants, grease, etc.
- Workers should be trained on how to prevent falls on icy, wet, and unstable conditions (loose gravel or sand)

PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

Walking Surfaces

The quality of walking surfaces is critical in preventing slip and trips. Flooring should be regularly maintained to eliminate tripping hazards, such as bunched carpet, chipped tile or hardwood, missing tiles, etc. Replacing floors, installing mats, or resurfacing floors can help to improve safety and reduce the risk of falling. However, it is important to remember that improving the quality of the flooring also requires good housekeeping practices to be effective.

Weather is also a significant factor in relation to slips, trips, and fall hazards. Rain, snow, ice, leaves, mud, etc., can all become hazards. Parking lots, walkways, stairs, and other high traffic areas should be monitored frequently for any of the identified hazards and control measures should be put in place to remove/eliminate these hazards.

Lighting

Any lighting that is not working should be repaired immediately. Any identified dark areas should be well lit to avoid tripping over hazards, or slipping due to a change in floor condition.

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is very important when working to prevent falls due to slips and trips.

Without having good housekeeping practices, preventive measures (e.g., specialty footwear or floor surfaces) will not be fully effective. Good housekeeping includes:

- Provide housekeeping standards training for workers and supervisors before starting work
- Clean up any spills immediately and investigate its cause to prevent reoccurrence
- Immediately correct any hazard that might cause a fall or report it to a supervisor
- Keep walkways and floors clear of boxes, extension cords and litter
- Sweep debris from floors
- Move anything that is stored on or near stairways or report the hazard to a supervisor
- Mark any temporarily made wet areas with signs or limit pedestrian access
- Secure mats, rugs, and carpets to prevent slippage and overlaps

PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

- Make sure to always close file cabinet or storage drawers
- Cover cables that cross over walkways
- Keep walkways and work areas well lit for good visibility

Footwear

When selecting proper footwear, it is important that it be appropriate safe footwear for the work environment (e.g., slip-resistant safety shoes or boots in an agricultural work environment, factory or warehouse). Footwear that fits properly, increases comfort and helps to prevent fatigue, which also improves safety for employees.

Working on the Same Level

- Take your time and pay attention to where you are going
- Adjust your pace to suit the walking surface (e.g., wet, rough, icy, sloped or cluttered)
- Make wide turns at corners
- Use a flashlight if you enter a dark room where there is no light
- When carrying a load, be sure that there is clear visibility over or around the load
- Close cabinet doors and drawers
- Hold handrail when going up or down stairs
- Floor openings should be guarded by a standard fixed railing surrounding the hole
- Walk when using stairways – don't run
- Open, exposed stairways should have a railing – be sure to use it
- Closed stairways should have at least one handrail
- Keep stairways uncluttered
- Keep platforms or steps on machinery clean and dry
- Use handholds, handrails and steps provided on riding machinery (e.g., lift trucks, tractors) when mounting or dismounting, using the 3-point system (both hands and one foot or one hand and two feet on the machine at all times)

PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

Pictograms

Here are some pictograms you can use when setting workplace standards and providing training to help warn against specific hazards related to slips, trips, and falls or when using stairs. For each hazard warning pictogram there is a corresponding one that demonstrates control information for that hazard.



Trip Hazard



Control



Slip Hazard



Control



Fall on Stair Hazard



Control

PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

Resources

1. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), OSH Answers
2. Ministry of Labour, Fact Sheet #6, January 2011
3. Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Slips, Trips and Falls In The Workplace

© Workplace Safety & Prevention Services 2013. Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS) grants permission to approved end users to reproduce this document in whole or in part, provided its intended use is for non-commercial, educational purposes and that full acknowledgement is given to the WSPS. Approved end users are firms registered with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. WSPS reserves the right to extend this permission to other stakeholders and interested parties by express written permission upon application. WSPS extends no warranty to materials amended or altered by the end user. Under no circumstances is this document, or any portion thereof, to be duplicated for purposes of sale or for external reproduction or distribution.

Revised: October 2011