

Toolbox Talks

Slips, trips, and falls

Introduction

Slips, trips, and falls are the most common cause of work-related injury at the University. About 20% of all of the University's workers' compensation claims are the result of a slip, trip, or fall. On average, the University receives over 150 workers' compensation claims from employees per year resulting from slips, trips, or falls. On average, these claims cost the University over \$6000 per claim. This does not include the costs associated with claims from non-employees like students and the general public.

Slips, trips, and falls result in a wide range of injuries: from cuts, scratches, sprains, and strains, all the way to broken bones, spinal cord injuries, or even death.

Types of falls

Slips and trips *may or may not* be followed by a fall, but injury may occur in either case. There are two major types of falls:

- Falls to the same elevation. These occur when a person falls to the same level he or she was on originally. About 60% of slips, trips, and falls fit into this category.
- Falls to a different level. These occur when a person falls to a different elevation than the one he or she was on originally. Obviously, the vast majority of these incidents involve a fall to a lower level, but falls to higher levels are possible (for example, when a person stumbles going up a flight of steps). About

40% of slips, trips, and falls involve a fall to a different elevation.

Falls to the same elevation are much more frequent than falls to a different level, but obviously, falls to a different elevation are far more likely to be serious.

What is a "slip"?

Slips result from too little friction between a person's foot and the walking surface. Causes include wet or oily surfaces; weather hazards such as ice; loose, unanchored rugs or mats; and flooring or other walking surfaces that do not have same degree of traction in all areas.

What is a "trip"?

Trips result from a person's foot unintentionally striking an object, causing the person to lose balance and perhaps fall. Common causes are obstructed views; poor lighting; clutter; defective or wrinkled carpeting, rugs, floor mats, etc.; exposed wires or cords; lower drawers of file cabinets or dressers not being closed; and uneven walking surfaces.

How to prevent falls due to slips and trips

Both slips and trips result from unintended or unexpected change in the contact between the feet and the ground or walking surface. This shows that good housekeeping, quality of walking

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surfaces (flooring), selection of proper footwear, and appropriate pace of walking are critical for preventing fall accidents.

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is the first and most important way to prevent falls due to slips and trips. It includes:

- cleaning all spills immediately
- marking spills and wet areas
- mopping or sweeping debris from floors
- removing obstacles from walkways and always keeping them free of clutter
- securing (tacking, taping, etc.) mats, rugs, and carpets that do not lay flat
- always closing file cabinet or storage drawers
- covering cables that cross walkways
- ensuring proper lighting and replacing used light bulbs and faulty switches
- immediately contacting FM about unsafe work surfaces, such as unsafe carpet, rugs, floor mats, tiles, etc.
- notifying FM of any unsafe accumulations of ice or snow

Flooring

Recoating or replacing floors and installing mats, pressure-sensitive abrasive strips or abrasive-filled paint-on coating, and metal or synthetic decking can further improve safety and reduce risk of falling. However, it is critical to remember that high-tech flooring requires good housekeeping as much as any other flooring. In addition, resilient,

non-slippery flooring prevents or reduces foot fatigue and contributes to slip prevention measures.

Footwear

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

Properly fitting footwear increases comfort and prevents fatigue which, in turn, improves safety for the employee.

What can you do to prevent slips, trips, and falls?

- Avoid areas where slipping/tripping hazards are known to exist. For instance, a surprising number of people slip on ice which they know to be present, but make no effort to avoid (i.e., by walking around it).
- Take your time and pay attention to where you are going.
- Adjust your stride to a pace that is suitable for the walking surface and the tasks you are doing.
- Walk with the feet pointed slightly outward.
- Make wide turns at corners.
- Always make sure there's adequate light for the task at hand. Report any burned out or defective lights.

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- Make sure that things you are carrying or pushing do not prevent you from seeing any obstructions, spills, etc.

Questions

If you have questions on this topic, please contact the Office of Occupational Health and Safety at (612) 626-5008 or uohs@umn.edu, or see the website at <http://www.ohs.umn.edu>.

Toolbox Talks

Attendance

Training records must include copy of toolbox talk information

Date of toolbox talk: _____

Conducted by: _____

Names of attendees:

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