

## PREVENTING INJURIES FROM SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

Almost one in five workplace injuries is the result of a slip, trip or fall. Slips happen where there is too little friction or traction between the footwear and the walking surface. Trips happen when your foot collides with (strikes, hits) an object causing you to lose your balance. Falls are when you lose contact with the walking or working surface and fall. Falls can occur either on the same level or from an elevated surface. Falls from an elevated surface are second only to motor vehicle accidents in the cause of work place fatalities.

The hazards which result in slips, trips and falls generally can be grouped into three (often interrelated) factors:

### 1. Equipment

- improper footwear
- uneven surfaces
- foreign substances on surfaces such as oil or litter
- unguarded sides and edges of elevated platforms

### 2. Human

- Inattention or distractions
- haste
- human error
- failure to follow instructions
- fatigue

### 3. Environmental

- poor lighting
- weather-related conditions
- poor housekeeping practices

The presence of multiple factors increases the risk. For instance, a polished marble floor may not present a slipping hazard to someone wearing rubber-soled shoes; however, when the floor is wet from mopping or snow being tracked in from the outdoors, the risk of slipping greatly increases. The addition of other factors such as poor lighting, inattention, and haste are likely to further increase the risk.

Your employer is required to ensure that you are trained before you use fall protection equipment or work on elevated work surfaces that require fall protection equipment. Fall protection equipment is required when working in general industry at 4 feet above the ground and at 6 feet in construction.

## **KEY STEPS TO REDUCING THE RISK OF SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS**

### Practice good housekeeping

- Keep work areas clean and free of spills, debris and clutter. If spills occur, clean them up or barricade the area until they can be cleaned up. Pick up debris and throw it out. Put items and tools away where they belong.
- Put mats down on floors in entry ways to absorb water from rain or snow.
- Close desk or cabinet drawers and doors.
- Keep stairs, aisles and walkways clear of obstacles.
- Replace or report burned out light bulbs.
- Replace barriers or guardrails that are removed to perform work activities.
- Be on the lookout for slip, trip and fall hazards and either fix the hazard or report it to your supervisor for repair.

### Be a defensive walker

- Watch where you are going while walking – pay attention and look for slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Walk, don't run – make sure you give yourself enough time to get where you are going.
- Don't engage in activities that may be distracting while you are walking – for example talking on your cell phone, reading e-mail or texting.
- Use handrails while climbing or descending stairs.
- Check that your walkway is clear and that your view is not blocked before you lift anything.
- Don't carry a load that you can't see over or around while carrying.
- Walk carefully and slowly when transitioning from one walking surface to another.
- Slow down and take small steps if the walking surface is cluttered, narrow, uneven, slippery or at an angle.
- Wear stable shoes with non-slip soles.

### Follow the rules when using a step ladder:

- Inspect the ladder before use.
- Open fully on solid ground. Do not set up on other objects to increase the height that can be reached.
- Make sure shoes are free of mud, grease or anything slippery before climbing.
- Maintain three point contact by keeping two feet and a hand or two hands and a foot on the ladder at all times.
- Dismount from the bottom rung rather than jumping from a ladder.
- Do not climb higher than the second tread from the top of the ladder.
- Keep your hips within the side rails while working. If you need to reach beyond that area, move the ladder.
- Do not perform electrical work with a ladder that is not approved or rated for such work.
- Do not setup the ladder near a doorway unless the door has been blocked open, blocked, or guarded.
- Do not exceed the ladder's safe working load (weight) limit.
- Ask questions if there is any part of the training that is not clear.
- Ask to be retrained when you think you need it, such as when workplace conditions change or new equipment is used.
- After training, follow your employer's instructions for safety equipment, inspection procedures and work rules.

Always properly wear required fall protection equipment when working. The equipment does no good if it is not worn or is not properly secured. Remember: You are the person who will suffer the consequences of your decision not to wear the equipment.