

Preventing Falls A Guide for Supervisors

Why People Fall

Falls are likely to be the result of one or more of six basic causes:

- Slips,
- Trips,
- Equipment failure,
- Sudden motions,
- Inattention, or
- Unsafe practices.

To reduce the risk of falls, it is important to ensure the installation of safe physical and mechanical facilities; adequate lighting; immediate correction of existing fall hazards; preventive maintenance; best working methods; preplanning of sea-sonal or unusual jobs; and adequate instruction, training, and supervision. New and remodeled facilities should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Slips

It isn't possible to list preventive measures for slips on all combinations of walking surfaces and slippery matter. The following are precautions for some of the more common slip hazards:

- Eliminate sources of leaks by repairing problems where they originate;
- Keep walking surfaces clean through adequate floor maintenance and use of slip-resistant floor coatings;
- Clean up spills immediately, use caution signs, and do not leave a spill unattended while you go for cleaning supplies;

- Control splattered, splashed, or dripped liquids by using splash guards, drip pans, screens, gutters, drains, etc.;
- Install "non-skid" material, which may be metal, abrasive, neoprene, duckboard, etc.;
- Repair or replace areas of smooth or worn flooring;
- Place mats at equipment operators' stations to provide traction;
- Salt or sand icy surfaces promptly at building entrances or exits and all outdoor walkways;
- Instruct employees regarding necessary care in walking within certain areas - running should never be allowed;
- Make sure employees wear proper footwear with slip-resistant soles and heels;
- Put warning signs at sharply angled or intersecting passageways;
- Avoid using scatter rugs; and
- Provide slip-resistant materials in shower and tub areas.

Trips

The following is a brief list of preventive measures that help protect against trips:

- Make sure aisles and passageways are well defined,
- Store material properly; keep walkways clear,
- Avoid low-height merchandise displays,
- Install adequate waste and scrap receptacles,
- Provide sufficient area lighting,

- Supply dolly trucks or tool boxes for maintenance employees,
- Store air hoses and extension cords in off-the-floor locations,
- Encourage employees to keep work areas picked up,
- Promptly repair breaks, cracks, and other floor defects, and
- Eliminate needless fixed obstructions.

Equipment Failure

When pieces of physical or mechanical equipment break or fail, people using them often fall. Preventive measures generally are found in the proper design, construction, installation, inspection, maintenance, and use of all physical and mechanical equipment, including such items as:

- Stairs, steps, ramps, railings, and machine platforms;
- Scaffolds and all overhead structures, flooring, catwalks, etc.;
- Rigging equipment;
- Hand tools;
- Power and hand trucks;
- Storage drawers and all sliding or hinged doors;
- Elevators and elevator gates;
- Window-washing gear;
- Ladders and stepladders; and
- Vehicle steps.

Sudden Motions

Unexpected noise, sudden starting of equipment, horseplay, running, and jumping between different levels are all factors that can cause falls. Any suddenly applied forces tend to startle and throw people off balance. Preventive measures may include the following:

- Whenever possible, warn employees of the occurrence of any unusual noise.
- Employ teamwork and coordination to prevent the unexpected starting of machinery.

- Utilize supervisory control to prevent horseplay, running, and jumping.

Inattention

Daydreaming, distraction, or preoccupation is probably a factor in most falls. Preventive measures may include the following:

- Use educational appeals to “Keep alert,” “Watch where you’re going,” “Never read and walk at the same time,” etc.
- Install warning signs and signals in areas where falling hazards exist.
- Paint unavoidable tripping hazards in contrasting colors.
- Prevent falls into elevator shafts by using interlocking standard gates, proper loading and operating methods; and stress employee alertness.

Unsafe Practices

Many falls are the result of people doing things the wrong way or in an unsafe manner. Controlling other people’s behavior is difficult, but here are some suggestions that can help:

- Instruct workers to keep their weight evenly balanced on both feet, and to approach all stairs or steps squarely - not diagonally.
- Direct employees to avoid running or hurrying, especially around corners, up and down stairs, on ladders, etc.
- Educate employees not to carry material in such a way that their view of the walkway surface is obstructed - encourage them to use material handling aids and to make two trips if necessary.
- Emphasize the importance of keeping work shoes in good condition.
- Train employees to brace their feet and body before pushing or pulling on machinery, drawer handles, hand tools, etc., which might give way suddenly.
- Install conveyor walkways to prevent people from stepping on moving conveyors.

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- Never allow workers to get on or off a moving vehicle, and be sure they always face the direction of travel.
 - Advise employees who fall repeatedly, with no other evident cause, to consult medical advice.
 - See that employees use ladders and stepladders properly; and do not stand on chairs, desks, boxes, etc.

In general, safe work methods will be determined by preplanning and by past accident experience. Fall prevention requires that these safe methods be clearly defined, communicated to all employees through instruction and training, and consistently reinforced by your example and supervision.

Loss Prevention can provide on-site safety consulting services regarding identification,

measurement, and control of fall exposures. Contact your local Loss Prevention representative for additional details.

Next to motor vehicle accidents, falls have been the most important cause of death and injury in the United States. In one typical year there were 20,500 deaths from falls, which represented one-fifth of the accident death total. A study of claims showed that slips and falls represented 23% of the number and 26% of the cost of compensated accidents.

Falls can occur anywhere, at any time, on any surface, including floors, stairs, sidewalks, ramps, vehicle steps, parking lots, and construction sites. Preventing falls requires an understanding of how they occur, and what measures a supervisor can take to eliminate or control fall hazards.

Notes

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