



Reduce slip, trip and fall injuries

Slips, trips, and falls are among the most common causes of injuries causing lost workdays, but you can benefit from a recently released study of safety measures implemented in the healthcare industry that resulted in a dramatic reduction of such incidents.

The study focused on the healthcare industry, as it ironically has the highest instances of slip, trip and fall injuries. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted research in three acute-care hospitals to identify major causes of slips, trips and falls and develop effective measures for preventing them. Over a 10-year period following the implementation of preventive measures, workers' compensation costs arising from slips, trips and falls in the three hospitals declined by *59 percent*.

What's causing injuries?

The specific causes of slips, trips and falls vary. The slick floors in your workplace might be created by a different substance than those in a hospital, but the prevention principles can be broadly applied to any workplace and any industry. NIOSH and the CDC identified the following factors that cause injuries, as well as suggestions of how to reduce injuries and lost days of work.

Contaminants on floors and walkways. Kitchens, bathrooms, building entrances and other areas where floors and walkways that are often wet or contaminated present a risk. The CDC suggests creating a written housekeeping program that includes well-documented housekeeping procedures. Two-step mopping also helps. This technique, in which a cleaning solution is applied, then removed, is more effective than traditional damp mopping, and helps reduce slipping hazards. Similarly, in persistently slick areas, workers should wear slip-resistant shoes. Also correctly align pipes with the drain they empty into, unclog drains regularly and redirect downspouts away from sidewalks.

Indoor walking surface irregularities. There are many ways to control damaged, warped, buckled or uneven flooring surfaces to reduce injury. Reduce or restretch loose or buckled carpeting. Remove indented or blistered vinyl tile, patch underneath and replace it with new tile. Eliminate trip hazards that measure more than a quarter-inch high in all areas of pedestrian travel by using beveling or ramps. Replace smooth flooring surfaces in any areas that are normally exposed to water, grease, and/or particulate matter with rougher-surfaced flooring. Finally, make sure elevators are leveled properly so that the elevator floors line up evenly with hallway floors.

Weather conditions. Ice, snow, and rain are common causes of falls. To reduce risks, provide additional mats in slick, wet areas. Promptly remove ice and snow from parking lots, garages and sidewalks. Place freezing-weather warning monitors at entrances. Also place bins of ice-melting chemicals in outdoor areas where there is heavy pedestrian traffic.



Reduce slip, trip and fall injuries *continued*

Outdoor walking surface irregularities. Outdoor falls are often the result of poorly maintained and uneven ground, protruding structures, holes, rocks, leaves and other debris. Patch or fill cracks greater than one-half inch wide in walkways. Point out changes in elevation by using safety-yellow warning paint. Eliminate concrete wheel stops in parking lots. Finally, cover underground watering systems or post signs to call attention to these structures to prevent someone from tripping.

Inadequate lighting. Insufficient lighting makes it harder to see hazards, so increase their visibility by installing brighter bulbs or more light fixtures in poorly lit areas. Install light fixtures that emit light from all sides.

Stairs and handrails. Poorly designed and poorly maintained stairs and handrails can lead to falls. Use slip-resistant treads and nosing that covers the entire tread, especially on outside steps. Place handrails at an appropriate height, 34 to 38 inches from the stepping

surface. Make sure that handrails extend the full length of the stairs plus 12 inches at top and one tread-depth at the bottom.

Tripping hazards. Use wall-mounted storage hooks, shelves and hose spools to store general clutter like loose cords, hoses and wires.

Mark walkways and keep them clear. Cover cords on the floor with a beveled protective cover. Use mats and runners large enough that people walk several footsteps on them, thereby cleaning contaminants off their shoes before walking on the floor. Use beveled-edge, flat and continuous or interlocking mats. Replace mats that are curled, ripped or worn and secure edges with carpet tape if needed. ■

Thieves bulldoze their way to illegal profits

The construction, highway, agriculture and hauling industries count on heavy equipment to get their jobs done. What they don't count on is their commercial equipment being stolen, but heavy equipment theft is a growing problem in the United States. The National Crime Information Center (NCIC) says nearly 1,000 pieces of commercial equipment are reported stolen each month.

What makes commercial equipment such a tempting target for thieves? Huge profits. Thieves, many of whom belong to organized crime rings, enter jobsites after hours, load equipment onto trailers and then either resell the machinery to unsuspecting buyers, dismantle the equipment into smaller pieces for resale as spare parts or illegally export it to other countries.

Value and mobility are two key factors that influence whether or not thieves are likely to steal a piece of heavy equipment. Newer pieces of equipment are more likely to be stolen than older ones, and age, condition and brand determine a machine's perceived value. Thefts also spike during peak construction months. Further, the potential for theft going unnoticed for an extended period of time also increases when equipment owners move pieces between jobsites and fields. Loaders, backhoes, tractors, mowing equipment, bulldozers, forklifts, compressors, generators, excavators and trenching equipment are frequently targeted by criminals for their high direct-resale value. Indirectly, these losses cause costly job delays, downtime for businesses and higher insurance premiums.

Owners must exercise diligence in protecting their investments. Failure to do so increases the risk of theft and further adds to the annual cost of equipment theft, currently estimated to range from \$300 million to \$1 billion. With a recovery rate of less than 20 percent, the odds of recovering your equipment are not in your favor. ■

Source: National Insurance Crime Bureau