

# Alaska Municipal League Joint Insurance Association

## Loss Control Incentive Program FY 2021

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### SAFETY BRIEF: PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

#### Introduction

Slips, trips, and falls take a substantial toll in terms of death, personal injury and suffering, workers' compensation, loss in productivity, and liability. Loss of productivity is often an unfortunate side effect. On average, workers who are injured as a result from a slip, trip, or fall accident spend more days away from work than those who are injured as a result of other causes.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), slips, trips and falls constitute the majority of general industry accidents and result in back injuries, strains and sprains, contusions, and fractures. Additionally, they cause 15% of all accidental deaths and are second only to motor vehicles as a cause of fatalities.

The intent of this safety training is to reduce injuries and incidents caused by slips, trips, and falls, and to ensure the safety of employees and members of the public while in or on the employer's facilities and property.

**\*Every year, the AMLJIA pays approximately \$950K in total claims for slips, trips and falls.**

#### Hazard Control

There are several ways to control hazards in the workplace. When we cannot eliminate or substitute hazards on the worksite, other controls include, engineering and administrative controls.

#### Engineering Controls

Controls that are engineered into the job are the most effective type of controls. Engineering Controls include:

- Redesign of equipment
- Substitution of a material, equipment, or process
- Change of process to minimize slips, trips, and falls
- Use of barriers to isolate a hazard
- Use of barriers to isolate a person

#### Administrative Controls

Controls that change the way people do their jobs. They are only effective when people do what they are supposed to do. Administrative controls include:

- Education and training
- Signage
- Routine inspections of ladders, stairs, walking and working surfaces
- Maintenance
- Good housekeeping

#### Surface Inspection and Maintenance

OSHA's revised standard (CFR 1910.22(d)) requires that employers inspect walking working surfaces regularly, and as needed, correct, repair, or guard against hazardous conditions. All walking and working surfaces should be inspected regularly. Supervisors and employees should be observant of possible slip, trip and fall hazards at all times. Any observed hazards should be immediately reported.



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### **Slip-Resistant Materials**

Ideally, all floors should provide "high traction." Floors that cannot be modified to "high traction" status must be reviewed and approved by management, and be documented and monitored. Abrasive coatings can be applied to concrete, metal and wood surfaces to increase traction and reduce the risks of slips and falls. Many of these products can be applied like paint; others can be troweled on in a thin coat. These coatings are formulated to resist grease, oil, water and a wide range of chemicals. Most paint and building supply companies handle these materials. It is important, however, to purchase the correct product for your particular problem.

Another effective skid-resistant material is rubber or rubber-like mats. This material is long-wearing and skid-resistant on both the top and bottom sides. Skid resistant mats would be most effective in water treatment plants, cafeterias, and facilities that experience wet or oily surfaces due to the nature of the work.

### **Safety Signs and Tape**

Safety signs to remind people of slip, trip, and fall hazards are always helpful, particularly where hazards cannot be removed or corrected. Safety signs should be updated whenever conditions change, and should be placed in where all employees and building occupants can visually see.

Safety tape, or fluorescent paint can be used to identify walking and working areas is most effective if its meaning is enforced. Taped off areas should indicate that no object should be placed in these areas. Dropped and spilled materials should be removed and cleaned up immediately. Examples of taped off areas include the areas around equipment, electrical panels, and other sensitive areas where workers should not store additional equipment or obstruct.

### **Floor Cleaning & Good Housekeeping**

All floors must be maintained to reduce slip and fall hazards. Good housekeeping practices are critical and go hand-in-hand with safety. When facilities are noticeably clean and well organized, it's a good indication that employees are diligent about safety in other areas as well. Proper housekeeping is an ongoing procedure that requires diligence from every employee. Teach employees to watch for hazards, and make them responsible to correct hazards that can be easily remedied, such as smoothing out bunched floor mats, wiping up a small spill, properly storing items left in aisles or walkways, or applying ice melt to a slippery walkway. Establish housekeeping procedures as part of the daily routine.

### **Snow and Ice Management**

All sidewalks, entrances, loading docks and other areas of heavy foot traffic should be cleared of snow upon accumulation of ½ inch or more. These areas should be continually cleared as long as snow continues to fall. Parking lots should be cleared upon accumulation of 2 inches of snow or more. Ice melt should be applied to all sidewalks, entrances, loading docks and other areas of heavy foot traffic upon clearing snow from the surface. When thawing and refreeze is possible, a review of all parking lots and sidewalks should be conducted prior to business and ice melt applied as appropriate.

### **Behaviors that Lead to Falls**

There are specific behaviors which can lead to slips, trips and falls. Walking too fast or running can cause major problems. In normal walking, the most force is exerted when the heel strikes the ground, but in fast walking or running, one lands harder on the heel of the front foot and pushes harder off the sole of the rear foot, and greater traction is required to prevent slips and falls. Rapid changes in direction create a similar problem.



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### **Adequate lighting**

Adequate lighting to ensure proper vision is also important in the prevention of slips, trips and falls. Moving from light to dark areas, or vice versa, may cause temporary vision problems that might be just enough to cause a person to slip on an oil spill or trip over a misplaced object.

Use proper illumination in walkways, staircases, hallways, basements, dock areas, parking lots, and playgrounds. Upon entering a darkened room, always turn on the light first. Keep areas around light switches clear and accessible. Repair fixtures and switches immediately if they malfunction. Remember to check emergency lighting monthly, and immediately repair or replace inoperative emergency light fixtures. **(Remember, you can use your AMLJIA Safety Savings Account for safety purchases such as lighting equipment.)**

### **Proper Footwear**

According to the National Safety Council (NSC), there are 110,000 injuries each year to the feet and toes of United States workers, representing 19% of all disabling work injuries. The most important protection is to wear the proper footwear for your work and environment. Depending on your occupation, the shoes or boots should provide three major types of protection:

- The soles and heels should be slip-resistant
- The toe of the shoe should resist crushing injuries
- The shoe should support the ankle

### **Ice Grippers**

An effective way to prevent slips and falls during winter months is the use of ice grippers. Ice grippers are the equivalent of studded tires for your feet. These devices are similar to slippers that slide over the outside of your shoe and can be easily put on and removed when you exit and enter a building. It is important to remove ice grippers when entering a building as they can increase the risk of slips and falls on indoor flooring. **(Again, Remember, your AMLJIA Safety Savings Account can be used for safety purchases such as ice grippers.)**

### **Elevated Falls**

Elevated falls are less frequent but more severe than same level falls in the workplace. More than half of elevated falls are from heights less than 10 feet. Falls from ladders are a major cause of elevated falls but there are also significant numbers of falls from vehicles and equipment, loading docks, buildings, and other structures. OSHA requires fall protection for heights of 4 feet or higher.

### **Falls from Ladders**

Ladders may be fixed or portable and may be extension or stepladders. Only commercially manufactured Type I or Type II ladders should be used. Type I ladders are for heavy-duty use such as by utility workers, industrial contractors, and other heavy duty applications. Inspect ladders before use: check for cracks, loose rungs, splinters, and sharp edges. Never paint ladders, as the paint can hide potentially dangerous defects that make the ladder unsafe to use. Wooden ladders may be coated with linseed oil or an oil-based wood preservative to keep them from drying out and cracking, but allow ladders to dry thoroughly after treatment or the rungs will be slippery. Do not use chairs, boxes, barrels, etc., as substitutes for a ladder.

### **Falls from Vehicles and Equipment**

Death or serious injury is a frequent result of passengers falling from mobile equipment and truck beds. Unless the equipment is specifically designed to accommodate passengers, they should never be



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permitted. Many injuries occur in the simple process of getting into and out of trucks, and on or off equipment, trailers, or truck beds. When the steps are metal, there is an increased chance of slipping which increases even more when steps are wet, muddy, or oily. Keep the steps clean and as dry as possible, and always maintain three points of contact to prevent falls.

### **Falls from Loading Docks**

Loading docks and ramps are dangerous areas. They are often congested, heavy-traffic areas, and working and walking surfaces are often wet. Metal dock plates can wear smooth and become very slippery, and the edge of a dock plate invites slips, trips and falls. Proper housekeeping, well-designed traffic patterns, and the use of abrasive, skid-resistant surface coatings can reduce the risk of slips, trips, and falls.

### **Falls on Stairs**

Stairwells should be well-lighted and have sturdy handrails on both sides. Persons using the stairwell should have one hand free to be able to use the handrail.

### **Fall Protective Devices**

Workers at high elevations, such as ladders, platforms, or catwalks, must be protected from falling by some kind of fall protective device. This can be a protective cage, lifeline, lanyard, safety belt or harness; there are numerous devices on the market. OSHA's revised standard now includes a training requirement.

### **Recommendations**

Managers and supervisors must make a commitment to prevent accidental slips, trips and falls. Regular frequent inspections of working and walking areas should be conducted to identify environmental and equipment hazards which could cause slips, trips and falls. Special attention should be given to the walking working surfaces, housekeeping, lighting, vision, stairways and ladders. Immediate corrective action should be taken after the hazard is identified

Safety training on the prevention of slips, trips and falls should be provided for all new employees. Regular retraining should be provided for all employees. Special attention should be given to proper walking, carrying, climbing and descending stairways, ladders, vehicles, and equipment. Unsafe practices should be corrected immediately.

All workers must wear proper footwear for their work and environment, whether in the office, shop, or field. Ice grippers are recommended employees exposed to ice and snow.

All slips, trips and falls, with or without injury, should be reported, recorded and thoroughly investigated. Corrective action to prevent a repeat occurrence should be taken immediately.

Finally, if you are unsure where or what to buy for your walking surfaces, contact your risk control specialist. We can help you determine what would be the most appropriate purchase for your particular worksite. You may also wish to use your safety savings account funds to purchase these products.

Additional training is available through the AMLJIA Online University at [www.amljia.org](http://www.amljia.org). Log on to the Online University for courses related on this topic such as Preventing Slips, Trips and Falls (including courses specific to firefighters and law enforcement), Ladder Safety, and Fall Protection. For more information about the Online University, contact the AMLJIA at 800-337-3682.

