

SAFETY BRIEF: PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS

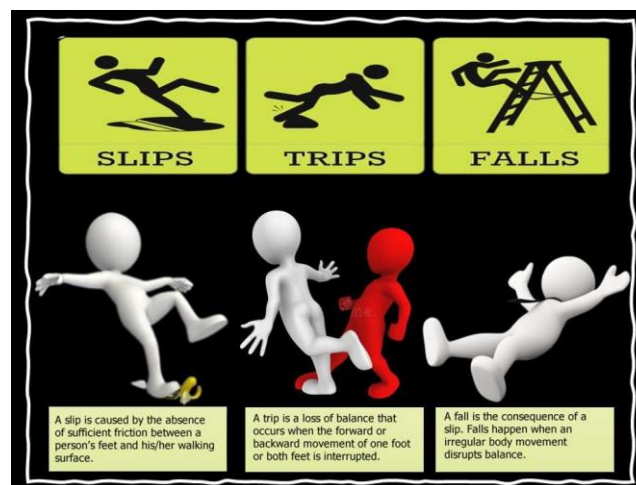
Slips, trips, and falls were the number one most frequent type of workers' compensation accident for the AMLJIA in FY 2023. **This past fiscal year, the AMLJIA paid out approximately 1.7 million in total claims for slips, trips, and falls!** Slips, trips, and falls consistently rank in the top three types of accidents in both the number of claims and the total cost of claims. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), slips, trips, and falls cause 15% of all accidental deaths, second only to motor vehicles as a cause of fatalities.

There are two types of falls: elevated falls, such as falling from a platform or ladder; and same-level falls. Today, we're going to focus on same-level falls, because the majority of fall-related injuries occur as a result of falls from same-level walking surfaces. Slip and trip incidents go hand in hand with same-level falls, so let's look at some of the primary causes of these workplace accidents and how we can prevent them.

A **SLIP** occurs when there is too little traction or friction between the shoe and the walking surface.

A **TRIP** occurs when a person's foot contacts an object in their way or drops to a lower level unexpectedly, causing them to be thrown off-balance.

A **FALL** occurs when you are too far off balance.



A good program to reduce slips, trips, and falls can be summarized to five key areas:

- 1) Every employee must practice good housekeeping.
- 2) Reduce wet or slippery walking and working surfaces.
- 3) Create and maintain proper lighting throughout work facilities and parking areas.
- 4) Require proper footwear on the job.
- 5) Control individual behavior.

Housekeeping. 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. The procedures may vary from department to department. For example, housekeeping procedures in an office may include closing file drawers and properly storing materials to keep aisles and walkways clear, while housekeeping in the shop may include returning tools to their place immediately after use and cleaning dusty, wet, or oily floors that could cause slips and falls.

Although every employee has a personal responsibility for keeping their work area clean and organized, it may be necessary to assign a specific person or group of employees to clean up a facility at specific intervals or after specific activities.

Reduce wet or slippery surfaces. Wet or slippery surfaces create hazards both indoors and outdoors. Some areas where injuries frequently occur include:

- parking lots
- entrance ways
- sidewalks/boardwalks
- floors in general

Weather conditions can change traction on outdoor surfaces considerably. Rain, snow, and ice create hazards and require frequent monitoring as conditions can change dramatically in a short period of time. Keep parking lots and sidewalks clean and in good condition, repairing cracks and holes as soon as possible. Replace loose or damaged boards in boardwalks. Adhesive striping material or anti-skid paint can also be applied to increase traction where wet surfaces create hazards. During winter, remove snow as often as needed (a 2-inch accumulation is a good rule of thumb to trigger snow removal) and treat for ice by applying ice melt or traction material. If expected daily temperature fluctuations could lead to ice formation, err on the side of caution and apply ice melt or traction material, especially in high-traffic areas such as entrances.

Indoors, use moisture-absorbent mats with beveled edges in entrance areas. In particularly wet or snowy conditions, it may be necessary to replace mats throughout the day as they become saturated. Make sure mats have non-skid backing material. Display "Wet Floor" signs as needed, such as after wet mopping or at entrances during wet or snowy conditions. Always clean up spills immediately; if an employee is unable to take immediate corrective action, make sure they are responsible for setting up a warning barrier and notifying appropriate personnel to take action. Use anti-skid adhesive tape in troublesome areas.



Keep aisles and walkways unobstructed. This is really just proper housekeeping, but with special attention to the aisles and walkways where injuries can result from trips caused by obstacles, clutter, materials, and equipment left improperly stored. Avoid leaving file drawers open or leaving boxes in aisles. Avoid stringing cords, cables, or air hoses across hallways or in any designated aisle. Never store items in hallways, even temporarily, and ensure exits are kept clear at all times. Pick up any loose items from the floor, and conduct periodic inspections for slip and trip hazards.

Create and maintain proper lighting. Poor lighting in the workplace and outdoor areas such as parking lots is associated with an increase in accidents. 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, your AMLJIA Safety Savings Account can be used for safety purchases such as this.)

Wear proper shoes. Employees must wear footwear appropriate for the duties of their work task. Whenever a fall-related injury is investigated, the footwear needs to be evaluated to see if it contributed to the incident. Weather conditions also factor in to the choice of footwear, as it may be necessary to put on boots or ice grippers when leaving a building if the shoes worn indoors do not provide sufficient traction for outdoor conditions. Encourage employees to wear ice grippers by placing reminder signs at building exits; providing seating at exits to allow employees to safely put on ice grippers or other footwear when exiting. Also post reminders to remove ice grippers upon entering a building, as they can cause slips and falls on indoor floor surfaces. Employees working on wet or oily walking surfaces should select footwear appropriate to the conditions.

Control individual behavior. This is the biggest challenge. It's human nature to let our guard down temporarily and be distracted by random thoughts or doing multiple activities. Being in a hurry will result in walking too fast or running, which increases the chances of a slip, trip or fall. Taking shortcuts, not watching where one is going, using a cell phone, carrying materials which obstruct the vision, wearing sunglasses in low-light areas, not using designated walkways and speed are common factors in many on-the-job injuries. Supervisors and managers can help by modeling desired behaviors and providing regular training and reminders (for example, a short "toolbox talk" reminder about housekeeping). Ultimately, it's up to each individual to plan, stay alert and pay attention. Slow is smooth, smooth is fast.

Remember you may use your AMLJIA Safety Savings account balance to purchase safety related items such as ice grippers, ice melt, anti-slip treads and non-skid strips to decrease the risk of a slip, trip or fall from occurring. Additional training is also available through the AMLJIA Online University at www.amljia.org. Log on to the Online University for courses on this topic such as "Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls." Online courses also include "Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls"



for Firefighters,” and “Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls for Law Enforcement Officers.” For more information about the Online University, or to check your Safety Savings account balance, contact the AMLJIA at 800-337-3682.