

Toolbox Talk

Fall Protection

Avoiding Slips, Trips, and Falls at the Worksite

Almost all falls can be prevented. All it takes is learning how to recognize fall hazards and how to prevent them. Everyone is exposed to fall hazards both on and off the job. Here are some tips to reduce risk of injury or death:

- Consider if a task can be performed without exposure to fall hazards.
- Complete training for fall hazards when available or required.
- Take breaks when necessary physical exertion to reach elevated spaces is required.

Slips

- A slip is a loss of balance when there isn't enough friction between feet and the walking surface.
- If walking on a low-friction, slippery surface, cannot be avoided, take small, deliberate steps.
- Consider adding abrasives to increase traction on surfaces that are frequently wet or are naturally slippery.
- Wear proper footwear which will prevent slipping and tripping. Avoid smooth soles and wear well-fitting, correctly fastened footwear.
- Keep walking surfaces free of water, oil, mud, and ice. Watch especially for slippery surfaces on sidewalks, stairways, entryways, around machinery, lunch areas, and washrooms.

Trips

- A trip happens when the foot strikes an object, and you are moving with enough momentum to be thrown off-balance.
- Keep clutter to a minimum. Common causes of falls are debris, tools & materials on the floor.
- Report any walking surface hazards such as obstacles, loose carpets, tile, or stair treads. Make sure openings and holes are adequately covered or guarded.
- Close desk and cabinet drawers and doors as soon as they are used. Many accidents are caused by tripping over them.
- Arrange workspaces so that there are clear passages for walking. Remove or cover cords and cables on walking routes. Store filled boxes away from traffic areas.
- Stick to established traffic routes. Taking shortcuts through areas, that contain unexpected obstacles, can cause trips.

Falls

- A fall occurs when the body is thrown off its center of balance and cannot recover.
- Don't jump down from an excessive height or across an unreasonable distance.
- Properly maintain the condition of stairs and handrails.
- Never use makeshift climbing devices. Get a step stool or ladder, and use it properly, to reach a higher surface. Don't stand on chairs.

- Use a fall restraint system instead of a fall arrest system wherever possible.
- When using a fall arrest system, make sure it's properly rigged to minimize the fall distance. Maintaining the clearance is necessary to avoid striking the ground or the structure above the work area.

Visibility

Work areas and traffic routes must be well-lit. Report or replace burned-out light fixtures. Do not store materials where they will block the light from windows or lighting systems. Keep windows and light fixtures clean. While dim light would ordinarily be considered a contributor to falls, light that is too bright can affect vision and fall hazard.

Understanding Balance

When falling, a worker's center of gravity is displaced and there's nowhere to go but down. Lose of balance can be caused by a slip (on a wet floor, for example) or a trip (over an obstacle in your path), but once footing and supports (such as a handrail) are lost, a fall is inevitable.

Stairs

Stairs can be dangerous, especially around construction sites. Loss of traction causes the highest number of slipping and falling accidents and is usually due to water, grease, mud, or other slippery substances. Slips are more likely to happen when in a hurry or running, when wearing the wrong type of footwear, or when not paying attention. Because stairs are used so often, it's easy to forget that they can be hazardous.

Follow these safety precautions to avoid slipping:

- Use handrails.
- Never run up or down stairs or jump from landing to landing.
- Never carry a load that blocks vision of pathway, especially when going up or down steps.
- Never store materials, tools, or equipment on stairways.
- Always be aware of the footpath.
- Report broken stair treads, handrails, or other unsafe conditions.
- Keep stairs free from water, grease, oil, dirt, mud, and other slippery substances.
- Clean up spills immediately.

Slips, trips, and falls continue to be one of the leading causes of accidental injury and death. Do everything possible to make the workplace safe for everyone and practice the tips outlined above. Don't engage in horseplay or perform activities on the job site that are not job-related.