The majority of workers who suffer critical injuries either fall or get struck by a piece of equipment or material. In most cases, falling or being hit by something leads to that unmistakable sound of cracking bone—fractures to arms, legs, heads, hips, and backs.

According to statistics from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, truck drivers and loading-dock workers, homebuilders, and lumber-yard workers suffer the bulk of fractures experienced in IHSA’s industries (see the chart below).

Not only are fractures a leading type of injury, they are also one of the most expensive types of workplace insurance claims.

In the last issue of the magazine, we outlined what construction workers and employers can do to prevent fractures. In this issue, we’re looking at how truck drivers, loading-dock workers, and their employers can reduce the risk of fractures.

Turn the page to find out how to reduce the risk of fractures in general trucking. Use these tips to give a safety talk.

In the next issue of Health & Safety Magazine, you’ll find the last article in this series on preventing fractures. It will focus on lumber and building supply yards.
Preventing fractures in general trucking

Prevent slips and falls

In the trucking industry, slips and falls contribute significantly to the number of workers who suffer fractures. Whether it’s a driver who slips while climbing in or out of the truck, or a loading-dock worker who slips while unloading the truck, the slip often results in a broken bone.

Climbing in or out

When truck drivers slip, it’s usually because they didn’t use 3-point contact when getting in or out of the cab. Remind your drivers to keep one hand and two feet, or two hands and one foot on the truck while climbing up or down. Never jump to the ground. If it’s wet or uneven, you could easily slip. Step down carefully.

In addition to maintaining 3-point contact, remind your workers to
- check the ground below for obstacles before exiting (e.g., tools, materials, a spill)
- never climb down with something in your free hand. Instead, put it on the vehicle floor and reach for it when you get down to the ground.
- climb out of the cab slowly after a long run to avoid pulling a muscle
- face the cab when getting in or out
- grip rails and handles firmly with your hands
- never use door frames or door edges as handles to climb down
- never use tires or wheel hubs as a step surface
- wear shoes with good support
- wear shoes with good soles that offer appropriate grip for the conditions—never sandals or bare feet
- be extra cautious in bad weather (e.g., rain or snow)

Unloading

When unloading flatbeds, remind your workers to
- make sure their boots don’t have mud, snow, ice, grease, or anything else on them
- check that the running board, tread, step, foothold, and platform are clean and dry before stepping on them
- place their foot securely on the step for foothold before stepping up
- have a firm grip before stepping up
- always be aware of their surroundings.

Metal can become much more slippery than other materials such as wood or concrete. When metal dock boards or ramps get wet with water, mud, or grease, they can be very dangerous. So, remind your workers to assess the conditions and use greater caution on metal surfaces.

Avoid getting hit

After falls, being hit or struck by vehicles or material is the most common way workers in the trucking industry end up with fractures. Review the tips below with your workers to help prevent them from getting hit.

- When opening the doors of a trailer, open one door first and then stand off to the side. This will prevent the door from swinging open if the load has shifted during transport. It also allows you to move quickly to one side if material falls out of the trailer.
- Always wear a safety vest to make yourself visible to other drivers. Safety vests are legally required in areas where there are moving vehicles.
- Before you remove a load from a trailer, make sure it’s stable and that it hasn’t shifted.
- If you are using a lift truck to unload material, keep workers out of the trailer when the lift truck enters or exits the trailer.
- Make sure the work area is well lit so that drivers and loading-dock workers can see clearly.

Secured loads

Removing material from a flatbed requires some special attention. If the load is secured by straps, workers should stand to one side of the flatbed when disengaging the ratcheting system. This will prevent the bar from striking the worker if it kicks back.

If the load is secured by chains, workers should stand to one side when removing the wire from the load binder. When releasing the straps or chains, workers should stand near the secure part of the load. This reduces the risk of something falling off the flatbed and hitting someone.