

Don't trip up

How to prevent slip and trip injuries



When you hear “falls”, you probably think about falling from a ladder, a roof, or some other high place. It's true that falls from heights do cause the most injuries, and they're usually the most severe. But did you know that about one-third of all lost-time fall injuries happen when workers fall to the same level they're standing or walking on? For example, a worker might fall after stumbling over a two-by-four, tripping on some garbage, or slipping on a muddy plank.

From 2001 to 2011, more than 14,000 Ontario construction workers suffered lost-time injuries from trips and slips. Statistics show that the body part most frequently hurt in such injuries is the knee. Other parts frequently injured are the shoulder, ankle, back, and wrist.

Most slip and trip injuries are caused by poor housekeeping (i.e., not cleaning up garbage around the site). The easy solution to this hazard is to keep your site clean.

What employers and supervisors can do

- ✓ Develop a plan for keeping the site clean, particularly for removing construction debris and other garbage from walkways, stairways, and work areas. You can develop a plan for continuous housekeeping or you can schedule it for a specific time.
- ✓ Include site-specific guidelines in your jobsite orientation describing contractor and worker responsibilities for keeping the site clean.
- ✓ Keep building entrances clear.

- ✓ Remind workers of their responsibilities by giving safety talks on housekeeping, especially when you see the site getting cluttered.
- ✓ Ask equipment operators to steer clear of soft ground and to avoid walkways. Otherwise the tires or tracks will make ruts in the ground, which can cause you to trip or twist an ankle. Repair ruts or uneven ground on walkways.
- ✓ Put down sand or salt in winter.
- ✓ Elevate the main walking paths.
- ✓ Fill low-lying areas with gravel to reduce the accumulation of water, ice, and mud.
- ✓ Provide enough disposal bins around the jobsite to make it easy for workers to put their garbage in the right place.

What workers can do

- ✓ Before starting work, look around your work area and become familiar with your surroundings.
- ✓ Keep the areas at the top and base of ladders clear of debris.
- ✓ Pay attention to your footing when carrying things.
- ✓ Don't walk backwards. If you have to walk backwards—say, to carry something with another worker—then make sure the path is clear ahead of time.
- ✓ Walk, don't run.
- ✓ Clean up after yourself.
- ✓ If you see a tripping hazard, clean it up or fix it. Otherwise, tell your supervisor.

Remember: Although the constructor and the employer can suffer financially after an injury, the worker is the one with the most to lose.