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## Slips, Trips, and Falls

### Introduction:

Fall incidents account for over 20% of all lost-time injuries in United States workplaces each year. When you think about these injuries, serious falls from higher elevations often come to mind. However, the majority of workplace falls occur at the same level rather than from a height. This document focuses on falls at the same level or “slips and trips”.

### Slips:

Slips happen when there is too little friction or traction between footwear and the walking surface. Common causes of slips include the following:

- Wet or oily surfaces
- Spills
- Weather hazards
- Loose rugs or mats
- Flooring or other walking surfaces that do not have the same degree of traction in all areas

### Trips:

Trips happen when your foot collides with an object causing you to lose balance and fall. Common causes of trips are:

- Inadequate lighting
- Poor housekeeping
- Obstructed view (i.e. carrying a large object)
- Uncovered cords or cables
- Uneven walking surfaces

### How can slips and trips be prevented?

Both slips and trips result from some kind of unexpected change in the contact between the feet and walking surface. Prevention efforts should include an emphasis on good housekeeping, maintenance of walking surfaces, and proper footwear.

### **Housekeeping:**

Good housekeeping is the first and most fundamental method of preventing slips and trips. It includes such practices as:

- Cleaning up all spills immediately
- Clearly marking wet areas
- Mopping or sweeping debris from floors
- Removing obstacles from walkways and keeping them free of clutter
- Securing (tacking or taping) mats, rugs, and carpets that do not lay flat
- Always closing file cabinets and storage drawers when not in use
- Routing cords and cables away from walkways or properly covering them
- Keeping work areas and walkways well lit

Without good housekeeping, other preventive measures will never be fully effective.

### **Walking Surfaces:**

Walking surfaces that do not offer adequate traction may need to be modified to reduce the potential for slips. Common methods of improving the slip resistance of surfaces include the following:

- Abrasive coatings can be applied to concrete, metal, and wood surfaces to increase the level of traction.
- Various slip-resistant products can be purchased in strips or rolls. These are designed for easy application to stair treads, ramps, and other hazardous surfaces.
- Another effective slip-resistant material is rubber or rubber-like mats. These can be placed at entrances, around equipment, and in areas where contaminants such as water or dirt may accumulate.

Winter weather also brings an increased potential for slips. Considerable effort is made to keep parking lots, sidewalks, and building entries free from ice and snow. Any problem areas should be reported promptly so that appropriate action can be taken.

### **Footwear:**

In workplaces where floors may frequently be oily or wet, prevention of fall incidents should include the selection of proper footwear. The material of the heel and sole of footwear is a major factor in its ability to be slip-resistant. In general, softer compounds are more slip-resistant than harder materials because they more effectively "grab" a floor surface. When purchasing work shoes or boots, it is best to consult a dealer who can help select the correct footwear based on the nature of the work and work environment.

### **Summary:**

Slips, trips, and falls at the same level result in significant injuries and costs each year. Stressing the need for good housekeeping, maintaining walking surfaces, and the use of appropriate footwear will help reduce the potential for these incidents.