



# Safety Matters

Talking Points for Supervisors

## Avoiding Slips and Falls

A janitorial helper was scrubbing the steps and floors with water and a cleaning agent. An observant worker realized that soon, dozens of people would be going down these steps to their coffee break. This person then took the proper action to avert this potentially dangerous situation and set up a wet floor sign.

An unguarded wet floor is only one of the many causes that accounts for millions of work-related injuries every year. Which is why it is important to spot unsafe conditions that could lead to slips and falls, and do what you can to prevent them.

There are various ways to suffer slips and falls while working. You can slip and lose your balance, you can trip over objects left improperly in your walkway, or you can simply fall from an elevated position to the ground. To avoid slips and falls, be on the lookout for foreign substances on the floor. Watch for deposits of water, food, grease, oil, sawdust, soap, or debris. Even small quantities are enough to make you fall.

When entering a building from the outdoors or from debris areas, clean your footwear thoroughly. Snowy and rainy weather requires a doormat at each entrance to allow for complete wiping of shoes. Don't go too fast, walk safely, and avoid changing directions too sharply.

Beware of tripping hazards. Trash, unused materials, or any object left in the aisles designed for pedestrian traffic invites falls. Extension cords, tools, carts, and other items should be removed or properly barricaded off. If equipment or supplies are left in walkways, report it. Let the proper personnel remove it. And keep passageways clean of debris by using trash barrels.

Walk where you are supposed to walk. Short cuts through machine areas invite accidents. Concentrate on where you are going – horseplay and inattention leaves you vulnerable to unsafe conditions. Hold on to handrails when using stairs or ramps. They are there to protect you should a fall occur. If you're carrying a heavy load that hampers your ability to properly ascend or descend stairs, use the elevator, or find help!

The worst falls are from elevated positions like ladders and scaffolding. They result in serious injuries and death. Learn and practice ladder safety and the proper use of scaffolding. For example, when climbing, use a ladder of proper length that is in good condition. Keep it placed on a firm surface. Do not climb a ladder placed on machinery, crates, stock or boxes. Keep the ladder's base one foot away from the wall for every four feet of height. Don't over-reach. Always have control of your balance when working from a ladder. Never climb a ladder with your hands full, and always carry tools in their proper carrying devices.

When using scaffolding, be sure it is properly assembled according to the manufacturer's specifications. Check carefully for defects. Standing and working planks should be level and clean. Use toe boards to prevent tools from falling and workers from slipping. Work only with people who practice proper scaffolding safety.

Slips and falls occur every day. The extent of injuries and their recurrence can be minimized through proper safety knowledge and attitudes.

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