



Facility Safety

Simple Dangers: How to Reduce Workplace Falls

Chris Warren | Mar 01, 2017

What You Need To Know

Slips, trips and falls account for 15 percent of accidental workplace deaths.
When working on a prevention plan, you'll realize that other issues may arise.
Make sure your associates are aware of the simple dangers.

Through a battle plan of prevention and awareness, injuries from falls can be limited.

Though slips, trips and falls may sound like minor inconveniences, the reality is, they're omnipresent and often serious. Slips, trips and falls constitute the majority of general industrial accidents and account for 15 percent of all accidental deaths, second behind fatalities caused by motor vehicle crashes, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

It doesn't have to be this way. "The vast majority of falls that take people out of the workforce are preventable," says Thomas Lodge, an architect and premises safety expert for Robson Forensic, a consulting company that provides investigations, reports and expert testimony to help resolve litigation and insurance claims. "As an architect or a building owner, there are many things we can do to alert people of potential hazards."

Think Accident Prevention

In Lodge's experience, awareness is key to prevention because slips, trips and falls occur when people encounter a condition—be it a hole in a floor or a slick or uneven surface—that they don't expect. "We can walk on ice even though it's slippery because we know it's important to change the way we walk," he says.

Alerting people to potential dangers can be accomplished using a variety of tools, from brightly colored cones and signs to mark where a spill has occurred to a handrail on a short riser of stairs that might otherwise trip someone up.

Don't Cause More Issues

It's also important to be careful that steps taken to prevent slips, trips and falls don't actually cause unsafe incidents. In a manufacturing environment where oils and lubricants are used, it's wise to place absorbent floor mats to limit the spread of liquids. Still, putting down a mat and forgetting about it could cause more problems than it solves.

"Knowing when to replace the mats is critical because they become saturated and useless," says Lodge. "Not only useless but more dangerous because people assume it's doing its job and don't expect to slip." The same is true for mats placed at the entrance of a building that aren't secured to the floor; once they start to move around, they become more of a hazard than a help.

Make the Dangers Known

Awareness isn't just about signs and guardrails. Lodge says it's important for workers to be educated about the specific areas in a facility where they may slip, trip or fall. "People always try to argue that it's common sense. It's not," he says. "People don't normally know what a dangerous condition might be, and they're not walking around looking for them. Training is very important."

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One aspect of training might even include awareness about the times of the day when workers might be most susceptible to a fall, such as at the end of a long shift or, if a worksite is outside, when daylight fades and visibility is impaired.

Preventing all slips, trips and falls may be impossible. Accidents still happen. That's why employee training should include how to respond to an accident. Making sure employees have first-aid skills and supplies can help keep an injured worker stable until professional medical aid arrives.

What slip, trip and fall hazards do you guard against?

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