

Workplace Safety

## Industrial Workplace Hazards Part III: Preventing Falls in the Workplace

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When most people think of falls, they think of a fall from a higher elevation to a lower surface. When I think of falls, I recall a time, watching my kids learn to walk. Every fall they took you felt the pain as their hands, knees, or head hit the ground. You wished you had a pillow or other cushioned surface for them to land on. You may be able to think of a time when you fell. Wouldn't it have been nice if the surface you fell on had been cushioned? The impact may have saved some of the pain, bruising and concussions that resulted from the fall.

According to Workers Compensation statistics from ITT-Hartford Insurance Company, "falls account for 16% of all claims and 26% of all costs. This compares to 33% of costs associated with sprains and strains." Included in this are falls from heights and same level (the working surface) which are among the leading causes of serious work-related injuries and deaths.

As you can imagine, the *Occupational Safety and Health Administration* (OSHA) has several regulations to prevent falls—guard rails, rope descent systems and personal protective equipment. In many cases, a same surface fall can occur and none of those regulations would have helped (unless you or your child wore kneepads, elbow pads, and safety helmets all the time). In situations of a same surface fall, it is usually the result of a slip or trip, and the hardness of the surface, concrete, tile, resulted in the severity of the injury.

Since most facilities have concrete, tile or other hard surface compounds for their flooring, it's best to take a facility wide approach to identify hazards. Formal walkways, entrances and workstation areas should be part of an audit. Solutions may be as simple as installing **modular flooring with a pattern designed for traction** or an entrance mat that dries or remove debris from a person's shoe, to more invasive epoxy floor coatings.

Taking the time to do a site survey of your facility is a great first step toward avoiding common injuries. Even though a same-level fall doesn't seem to receive the same attention as a fall to a lower level, the results can be just as debilitating. A **site survey** can help create a plan to proactively prevent falls. As a result it can help lower insurance premiums, lost work-time, creating a definite ROI.

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