

WINTER SLIPS AND TRIPS

IDENTIFY

Slips and falls cause an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of workplace injuries and most of them can be prevented. As temperatures drop, the risk of slips and falls rise, but a few important actions can make a big difference to everyone's safety.

Some of winter's hazardous conditions are obvious:

- Snowy and ice-covered pathways.
- Slippery indoor surfaces due to water, ice, or snow brought in by foot traffic.
- Melted snow, ice, or grit at entrances to buildings.
- Black ice on highways and paved surfaces.
- Obstructed sidewalks and roadways due to packed or uncleared snow and ice.

Other hazards might not come immediately to mind:

- Certain types of footwear may not be designed or suitable for cold/outdoor weather.
- Carrying items that are too large or heavy can obstruct your view or put you off balance.
- Cumbersome headwear can obstruct your view or cause fogging of eyewear.
- Trip hazards hidden under snow like uneven surfaces, scrap material, plastic, or ice.

COMMUNICATE AND CONTROL

Be prepared — monitor the weather

The environment has the potential to be hazardous and should be included in hazard identification methods in order to adequately prepare and mitigate weather-related safety risks. Covering work areas prior to snowfall and having adequate traction agents like ice-melt or sand can be effective means of mitigating weather hazards.

Wear appropriate footwear

The sole of a standard safety boot becomes very hard in cold weather and limits the friction needed to maintain a good grip when walking on slippery surfaces. There are a number of CSA approved safety boots that are rated and recommended for cold weather. Boot accessories with small spikes and soft rubber can be added to standard work boots for extra traction on ice and snow.

Habits to prevent a fall

Slip and trip hazards are inevitable in the winter months, but there are some habits you can adopt to prevent a fall in these conditions:

- Walk slowly and never run on frozen ground.
- Keep both hands free and out of your pockets (when possible) for proper balance.
- Use handrails from start to finish.
- Avoid carrying loads when possible.
- Keep your eyes on where you are going and take short steps.
- Step — don't jump — from vehicles or equipment.
- Maintain three-point contact when entering and exiting.

Fall "safely"

If you're going to fall, there are split second things you can do to lessen or even prevent injury:

- Roll with the fall. Try to twist and roll backwards, rather than falling flat and forwards.
- Relax as much as possible when you begin to fall. Tensing up increases the likelihood of pulling a muscle or dislocating your back.
- When falling backwards, lean forward or tuck your chin into your chest to avoid hitting your head on the ground.
- Toss whatever you are carrying. Protect yourself instead of the object(s) you are carrying.

Be aware of your surroundings

When you are around buildings, check for overhead ice or snow on roofs, walkways, or electrical lines. Be especially cautious around entrances, loading docks, curbs, and other areas where ice and snow can accumulate.

Wipe your feet before entering a building and before climbing ladders, stairs, or equipment.

Remove ice and snow from work platforms and entrances before starting work. Covering walkways or work areas the night before frost or snowfall can save a lot of time and effort the next day.

COMMUNICATE AND CONTROL

Remove icicles or heavy build up of snow or ice before working in the area where they can fall. Rope off the "drop zone" and safely remove anything that can potentially come lose later.

Always remember, if you see a slip or trip hazard: stop, communicate the risk to others, control the hazard, and monitor the situation moving forward.

THE QUIZ

1. Most slips and trips in the workplace can be prevented:

TRUE _____ FALSE _____

2. Is black ice always easy to see?

YES _____ NO _____

3. Name three "defensive walking" measures for preventing a slip or fall.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

4. When walking on ice, you should take long steps for stability:

TRUE _____ FALSE _____

5. Which of these should you do if you are falling:

- a) Relax as much as possible when you begin to fall
- b) Lean forward and tuck your chin to avoid hitting the back of your head on the ground
- c) Roll with the fall — twist and roll backwards rather than flat and forwards
- d) All of the above

6. When working outdoors in winter, which of these can be dangerous to walk on if ice and snow are not cleared properly?

- a) Access areas
- b) Platforms and scaffolds
- c) Steel or wood beams
- d) Roofs and walkways
- e) All of the above

7. List two boot accessories that can be added to standard work boots for extra traction on ice and snow.

- a) _____
- b) _____

8. List all areas on site where there is a risk of slip or trip hazards.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____
- f) _____

1. TRUE; 2. NO; 3. Walk slowly, use handrails, keep hands out of pockets; 4. FALSE; 5. d; 6. e; 7. Small spikes, soft rubber; 8. Site-specific answers

ANSWERS: