

Keeping a “sure footing” is one of the best ways to prevent a painful on-the-job injury. CONN-OSHA notes that more people die of falls at work and at home each year than from any other non-vehicle related cause. Over 13,000 deaths are the result of a fall each year, and 70% of these are due to a lack of ordinary or reasonable maintenance. More than 256,000 non-fatal slip, trip and fall injuries result in one or more lost workdays per incident (2013).

6 ways to reduce your risk of slips, trips, and falls

Step 1. Wear sensible shoes

To prevent slips and falls, a high coefficient of friction (COF) between the shoe and walking surface is needed. A COF of 0.5 or more is needed for excellent traction. On icy, wet, and oily surfaces, the COF can be as low as 0.1 with shoes that are not slip resistant.

To put these figures in perspective, a brushed concrete surface and a rubber heel will often show a COF greater than 1. Leather soles on a wet smooth surface, such as ceramic tile or ice, may have a COF as low as 0.1. Stiletto heels, flip-flops, shoes with taps on the heels, and/or shoes with leather or other hard, smooth-surfaced soles frequently lead to slips, falls, and injuries.

Step 3. Inspect walkways; report and repair hazardous conditions

- Inspect all walkways, stairs, parking areas, and sidewalks. Slip and fall accidents most often occur where there is a transition: from dry to wet, or one type of flooring to another.
- Report all hazards immediately to your supervisor and/or maintenance department.
- Follow-up to ensure all repairs are completed in a timely manner.

Step 5. Light up your space

- Provide adequate lighting for best visibility. Night time lighting should be used to assure that all walkways are illuminated, without shadows.
- Replace burned-out light bulbs and faulty switches.
- Exercise care when moving from light to dark areas, or vice versa.
- Clear the paths to light switches that aren't near room entrances.
- Consider installing glow-in-the-dark or illuminated switches.

Shoes with small or stiletto heels, flip-flops, heels with taps, and shoes with leather or other hard, smooth-surfaced soles frequently lead to slips, falls, and injuries.

Step 2. Remove hazards

- Remove boxes, newspapers, electrical cords, phone cords and other obstacles from walkways.
- Secure loose rugs with double-faced tape, tacks or a slip-resistant backing.
- Repair loose, wooden floorboards and carpeting right away.
- Immediately clean spilled liquids, grease or food.
- Use proper floor-cleaning methods.
- Use nonskid floor wax.
- Keep exterior walkways free of snow, ice and other debris.
- One of the **most dangerous situations** is a rapid change in the friction coefficient of the flooring material; use signage or consider changing the flooring material.

Step 4: Use assistive devices

- Use handrails on both sides of stairways and ramps.
- Attach nonslip treads on bare-wood steps.
- Ramps should be constructed to have a different texture from the floors around them.
- Place non-slip mats around entrance areas that may become wet or slippery.

Step 6: Keep moving

If you aren't already getting regular physical exercise, consider starting a general exercise program.

Consider activities such as walking or other aerobic activity, strength training, or any regular exercise routine. Such activities reduce your risk of falls by improving your strength, balance, coordination, and flexibility. Be sure to get your doctor's approval before starting a new exercise program.

For more information, attend CIRMA's Slip & Fall Prevention Training & Education program. Visit CIRMATraining.org for a current listing of training programs.

