

Take a Sure-footed Approach Toward Slips, Trips, and Falls

A comedian slips on a banana peel and the audience laughs. A schoolchild falls as he walks to the blackboard and another student asks, “Have a good trip?” The jokes are familiar, but slips and trips are no laughing matter. They take a heavy toll in the number of workplace injuries and lost workdays.

Not all falls occur because of wet floors, cluttered aisles, or missed steps. There are behavioral changes that can be emphasized to reduce the risk of falls or minimize their impact, such as:

- Walking techniques that use your feet as probes, especially on uneven or slippery surfaces or a dimly lit area.
- Balancing properly by keeping your head up and maintaining your body’s natural center of gravity.
- Getting your feet underneath you to quickly recover your balance after an initial slip.
- Protecting the most vulnerable parts of your body, such as your head and spine, if you do fall.

Whether your company implements behavioral, environmental, or a combination of measures to reduce slips, trips and falls, incident rates usually decline.

Investigate slips

The incidence of slips, trips, and falls at work may be even higher than the numbers show. Workers don’t report many of the incidents because they’re minor and make them appear clumsy, but this is a mistake. To reduce slips, trips, and falls, managers should stress the seriousness of all incidents, and have employees inform them of even the most harmless ones. Minor incidents that are reported may be clues to troublesome areas needing repairs and may actually help prevent a major incident from occurring.

Investigations should focus on the following areas, where most incidents occur:

- Ramps
- Uneven surfaces
- Areas with heavy traffic
- Cluttered areas
- Any area prone to wetness or spills
- Doorways and other transitional areas

Take control with training

Environmental changes alone can’t protect employees and guests. To further reduce the risk of falls, check that aisles are clear, floors are clean, signs are present to warn people of slippery areas, and that guests get the assistance they need.

Have managers stress these safety reminders:

- Go where you’re looking, and look where you’re going.
- If you drop it, pick it up.
- If you spill it, clean it up.
- Stay with all spills.

There are a variety of products that can reduce the chance of a fall. Some of the most popular products are slip-resistant floors, mats, and footwear.

Choose shoes made to grip

Safety experts recommend footwear with slip-resistant soles, especially for people who work in businesses where surfaces are slippery or employees move rapidly from one type of surface to another.



[Pick the right floor](#)

The appropriate floor covering depends on its use.

Here are some questions to consider when choosing an appropriate floor:

- What kinds of spills are likely?
- What are the sanitary requirements?
- Is noise a concern?
- Will the area have heavy traffic?
- What equipment must the floor hold?
- How will the floor be cleaned?
- Are aesthetic effects a concern?

Various nonskid floor coatings that increase traction also are available. Carpets provide good traction but can cause falls if they're worn or don't fit tightly. Make sure rug and runner edges are securely bound and beveled with rubber or plastic to avoid catching on shoes or boots.

Slip-resistant mats provide added protection in spots where spills are likely, such as in areas with heavy traffic or where customers and employees may track in water and dirt. Typical places for floor mats are at entrances, around equipment that uses or sprays water, in service aisles of stores and restaurants, and on bathroom floors. Some mats are made to direct water, grease, and other spills away from the walking surface. An added benefit of mats is they can relieve back and leg strain.

