

Mitigating Slips, Trips and Falls in the Workplace

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Preventative measures and a strong safety culture can help protect workers from slips, trips and falls.

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\)](#), workplace slips, trips and falls were among the top three causes of work-related injuries and lost time and productivity in 2020, along with exposure to harmful substances and overexertion. BLS data showed 22,410 non-fatal occupational slip, trip and fall-related injuries involving days away from work in the manufacturing sector alone. So, it's no surprise that safety professionals feel pressure to improve on-site and on-the-job safety to prevent workplace accidents and protect their crews.



On average, occurrences of slips, trips and falls result in 14 days of lost work time. That's a significant loss of productivity and a driver of other significant expenses, such as workers' compensation claims and training for a temporary replacement to handle absentee workers' responsibilities. A [report](#) from the National Safety Council (NSC) shows the staggering cost of workers' compensation: Between 2019 and 2020, slips and falls were the third most costly workers' comp claims, with an average individual claim of nearly \$49,000.

For employers looking to show employees they care about their safety while also aiming to mitigate the increasing costs associated with workers' compensation claims, individuals in safety management roles must identify potential factors that can contribute to an unsafe working environment and lead to injury. Success is not a by-product of profit alone; it relies on employee satisfaction and engagement, which companies cannot achieve if workers feel unsafe.

Take Preventative Measures

Many of us have walked into an establishment—such as fast casual dining, restaurants, food service facilities and other hospitality settings—and at some point noticed that the floor was wet. In some cases, the floor may have been so wet that simply walking to the bathroom could pose a hazard to safety. Now consider behind the scenes, where the daily demands and hustle and bustle mean consistent cleaning might fall down the list of priorities as employees focus on other tasks. There is a need to protect employees, as well as visitors, from slipping and falling on these slick surfaces.

Looking beyond hospitality toward industrial sectors—such as food processing, non-food manufacturing, automotive, transportation, warehousing and distribution, and janitorial—the hazards of slipping and falling are significantly higher. In these environments, a slip-and-fall incident could be a life-or-death scenario with employees operating heavy machinery, working at great heights, driving forklifts and other vehicles, handling hazardous chemicals, and more.

To prevent the aforementioned cases of dangerous slips, trips and falls, employers should take the following preventative steps in addition to practicing good cleaning habits:

- Place slip-resistant floor mats in areas that consistently get wet.
- Clear high-traffic areas of clutter, such as electrical cords, wires, hoses, boxes and more.
- Minimize elevation changes and ensure ramps, steps and other uneven floor surfaces are clearly marked.
- Ensure stairs are well lit with proper handrails and ladders have proper railings and guards.
- Build a culture that promotes safety and consider strategic safety partnerships.

Build a Strong Safety Culture

One of the recommended components of the creation of a strong safety culture is the encouragement of safety managers to purchase and ensure proper footwear is worn in the workplace. Providing product solutions for varying environments isn't just good for the bottom line; it's also good for individual employees' health and safety—and for the overall well-being of those who rely on a wage earner, especially in these challenging economic times.

Why are slip resistance and traction such essential factors to consider? Looking at an X-ray of the foot, one can see that the bony structure is shaped like a tripod. This structure must provide support for all of one's weight-bearing activities, a degree of shock absorption and balance. Slips are, by definition, a temporary loss of that balance, and even slips that do not result in falls can result in subsequent injury. Of the 22,410 non-fatal slip-related injuries cited by the BLS, 3,670 did not result in a fall. However, those reported injuries still had a significant impact on employers and employees affected by the loss of production time as well as family income.

Consider a Strategic Partnership

A corporate safety shoe program, where businesses enter into an agreement with a safety shoe provider, can offer numerous benefits. Such a program is one way for safety managers to ensure individuals get the proper footwear. It's a sustainable way to reduce workers' compensation costs and save hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of dollars annually. A lack of protective footwear can lead to serious accidents and incur significant claims. Employers offering partial subsidies could see both increases in participation levels and significant slip and fall reductions.

A safe workplace boosts morale for the entire company because safer employees are more engaged, efficient and productive. Beyond that, when companies are willing to foot the bill for safety footwear, it tells employees that leadership cares about their safety needs. Companies that invest in employee well-being programs can use it as a competitive differentiator to decrease turnover and attract top talent.

Recognize Different Working Conditions

Slip-resistant footwear must be able to perform under a wide range of conditions, just as tires require traction to keep one safe when driving a car in varying conditions, such as dry, wet, uneven or "contaminated" road surfaces. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to slip resistance.

Traditionally, slip resistance has been addressed with footwear outsoles that feature multiple, tiny lugs with hard leading edges, which create a high coefficient of friction (CoF)—a measurement of the friction or resistance to motion between two surfaces, and resistance on typical test surfaces in dry and wet conditions. While that works well in many environments, it is not optimal for workplaces with "contaminants" on the flooring surface, such as dairy production environments with cheese fines on the walking surface, bakeries or machine tool shops.

Floor surfaces can vary significantly, so outsole compounds and tread patterns must adapt and demonstrate the ability to expel liquids and debris in the workplace. Safety managers should consider the variety of product options provided when considering a strategic partner for a corporate shoe program.

Plan for Success

Safety and risk managers continue to face myriad responsibilities in the workplace, including:

- Educating employees on safe practices.
- Conducting environmental audits that assess the potential for risky slips, trips and falls.
- Evaluating workers' comp claims history and analyzing root causes.
- Implementing and communicating safety measures, such as footwear safety programs.
- Monitoring and incentivizing worker compliance.

Workplace accidents cannot be treated as rare, one-off events. Instead, leadership must proactively act to mitigate them. Embracing slip-resistant footwear that meets, and exceeds, technical standards is integral to building and maintaining a safe, secure workplace from the top down.

The evidence clearly shows that slips, trips and falls are more common than we'd expect or like to see. An organization-wide shift in how companies prepare for, handle and prevent such incidents is necessary to ensure long-term worker protection.