



Avoiding Slips, Trips and Falls in the Office

Slips, trips, and falls constitute the majority of general industry accidents. In the U.S., they cause 15 percent of all accidental, job-related deaths and are second only to motor vehicles as a cause of fatalities, according to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Housekeeping

So how can we all remain safe while at work? Some of the most frequently overlooked general safety precautions involve office housekeeping. Here are some suggestions from OSHA and the National Safety Council (NSC) for "Good Office Housekeeping".

Corridors, Stairs and Flooring

In order to maintain safe floor surfaces and walkways throughout the workplace:

- Keep all corridors, passageways, storerooms, and service areas clear of debris, boxes and storage. Never block these areas, even temporarily. Emergencies don't usually come with advanced warning and are not likely to give you time to clear cluttered escape paths.
- Keep stairwells clear at all times. Do not store boxes, files, or other debris in the stairwells or landings.
- Pick up dropped pencils, paper clips, and rubber bands that can cause you or a co-worker to skid.
- Contact building management if you see areas that are cluttered with rubbish.
- Wipe up spills immediately. If a spill is too large to clean up quickly, contact building management
- Report uneven, defective flooring, worn spots in carpets, chipped tiles, and worn stair treads to building management
- In areas where wet or damp conditions are likely to routinely exist, appropriate drainage should be maintained and grating, mats, raised platforms, or anti-slip strips should be evaluated and considered for control or prevention of slippery conditions.
- Every floor, work area, and passageway should be kept clear of obstructions that protrude into the walkway or have the potential to result in unsure footing, such as loose parts, boxes, packing material, or tools. This includes areas where construction or demolition debris has the potential of negatively impacting permanent or temporary walkways.

Common Filing Areas

In order to keep filing areas safe, the NSC suggests these procedures:

- Store the heaviest materials in the bottom drawer.
- Never leave the upper drawers of a file cabinet open.
- Open only one drawer at a time.
- Never open a drawer if someone is crouched below it.
- Shut a file drawer immediately after removing files.
- Use the handle when closing a drawer to help reduce pinch-point injuries.

The NSC also emphasizes the importance of keeping common areas clear of personal belongings, clutter, and wastepaper baskets. This does not preclude having a recycling container for common use.

A Little Common Sense Goes A Long Way in Office Safety

You can reduce your risk of office injuries from slips, trips, and falls with a little vigilance over the common things many of us take for granted, such as the way we sit in a chair, walk up the stairs, or carry writing implements in our pockets.

- Never tilt backward in a chair, especially on a tile floor. The chair can give out under your weight if it is not used properly and you could land on your back.
- Take care when going from well-lit to dark areas. The better you can see, the less likely you are to trip over objects on the floor, or to slip on wet surfaces. So give your eyes time to adjust if you cannot see at first.
- Always carry pens and pencils in a pocket, with the points facing down, and not in your hand. This is especially important on stairs, where you should always have one hand free to hold onto the railing for balance.

Here are some other ideas to help you reduce office slips, trips, and falls:

- Use the handrail on staircases.
- Look where you are going.
- Walk, don't run.
- Stay to the right in the United States.
- Slow down and steer closer to the right at corners.
- Walk with extra care on wet surfaces.
- Wear appropriate shoes for the surfaces on which you work or have to walk on to get to work.

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