

Toolbox Talk: Slips, Trips, and Falls in the Office

Introduction/Overview:

Slips, Trips and Falls happen everywhere. They account for 9.2 million emergency room visits annually and are the third leading cause of unintentional injuries leading to death. Such mishaps cost approximately \$70 billion annually in workers' compensation and medical bills. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention says that falls are the leading cause of death in the office environment, and according to the National Safety Council, they are 100% preventable.

Under the provisions of OSHA's General Duty Clause, employers shall furnish employees a workplace free from recognized hazards that are causing, or are likely to cause, death or serious physical harm. Hazards are not as obvious for office buildings as they are for construction or industrial settings that utilize enhanced fall protection measures not warranted or practical for the office. However, there are safety measures and practices which, if implemented, will increase safety awareness and provide a safer environment.

Talking Points to Reduce or Eliminate Falls in the Office:

- **Common Slip, Trip, and Fall Hazards**

- Tripping over an open desk or file drawer, electrical cords or wires, loose carpeting, or objects in hallways/walkways
- Bending or reaching for something while seated in an unstable chair
- Using a chair or table in place of a ladder
- Wet floors
- Inadequate lighting
- Distractions while walking (texting or talking on the phone)
- Inappropriate footwear
- Uneven surfaces

- **Agency Responsibility**

- Keep aisles, walkways and stairs clean and free of clutter
- Ensure proper lighting and signage
- Provide conveniently located step stools and ladders

Developed by:

- Manage cords
 - Maintain floors and walkways in good condition
 - Provide non-skid mats at entrance ways
 - Ensure spills are cleaned up immediately
 - Provide site specific employee training
- **Personal Responsibility**
 - Wear footwear that is in good condition and appropriate for conditions
 - Close drawers and cabinets immediately after use
 - If possible, clean spills immediately or mark/block off the area until it is cleaned up
 - Avoid carrying items that block your view (especially on stairways)
 - Be aware of your surroundings, don't text while walking
 - Use handrails on stairways
 - Do not use chairs or tables to reach objects overhead
 - Do not place boxes or other items in walkways
 - Report defective walkways and floors or other hazardous conditions

After a Fall:

- Check to see if you are injured. Take your time getting up even if you think you're OK. If you cannot get up: Call out for help if you think you can be heard; use your phone if available or, if not, slide yourself towards a phone or a place where you will be heard; wait for help in the most comfortable position for you. Report all mishaps to your supervisor as soon as possible.

Final Thoughts:

While slips, trips or falls often only result in embarrassment and a bruised ego, they can be deadly or crippling. However, they are 100% preventable with proper maintenance, housekeeping, and situational awareness.

NOTE: Always promote discussion with the attendees. If a question comes up that no one in attendance can answer, please contact DHRM/OWC/Loss Control Consultants for assistance.

Johnny Nugent

Risk Management Specialist

Johnny.Nugent@DHRM.Virginia.gov

804-225-2168

Lee Affholter, COSS, ASC

Loss Control Consultant

laffholter@lcinnovations.com

757-256-3364

Curtis H. Stacy, MESH, ASC, COHC

Loss Control Consultant

curtis.stacy@dhrm.virginia.gov

434-594-8978

References:

Latest numbers of injury and fatality rates for Slips, Trips, and Falls

<https://www.bls.gov/iif/>

Tips on preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls

<https://firstonsite.com/resource/10-ways-to-reduce-slips-trips-and-falls-in-your-business/>