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## Slips, Trips, and Falls: Preventing Workplace Trip Hazards



### PREVENTING WORKPLACE TRIP HAZARDS

When you think of a workplace accident, you probably think of something dramatic – an explosion or an amputation, for example.

But the second-most common cause of workplace injury is a trip or slip hazard that leads to a fall. And 20-30% of workplace falls result in a moderate or severe injury like deep bruising, broken bones, or concussions.

In fact, according to OSHA, slips, trips, and falls cause nearly 700 workplace fatalities per year – that's 15% of all workplace deaths.

The trouble is that the circumstances that lead to slips and trips tend to be spontaneous and changeable – they don't exist until suddenly they do. That means preventing slips, trips, and falls is an ongoing process that relies heavily on employees being able to recognize related hazards.

### What Are OSHA's Trip Hazard Regulations?

OSHA's primary standard for slip, trip, and fall hazards is the General Industry Walking-Working Surface standard (29 CFR 1910 Subpart D, which includes §1910.21-30).

Related Construction Industry standards are scattered throughout §1926, including Subparts C, L, M, and X. However, OSHA's 2017 slip, trip, and fall revisions aligned Construction standards with General Industry wherever possible.

Finally, some specific slip, trip, and fall OSHA regulations ensure a safe exit route from any workplace. After all, the last thing you want during an emergency evacuation is a bottleneck at the exit. These Means of Egress regulations are found under §1910.36-37.

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### Definitions Related to Slips, Trips, and Falls

The temporary nature of an OSHA tripping hazard makes a clear set of definitions even more critical.

### What is a Walking-Working Surface?

When you first see the name of OSHA's main trip and slip hazard, you may wonder what a "walking-working surface" is.

But it's just a surface you walk on...or work on. Walking-working surfaces include floors, aisles, stairs, platforms, and more.

### Slips vs. Trips

Slips and trips can lead to falls, but there's a pretty clear distinction between the two.



A slip happens when there's insufficient traction between your foot and the walking-working surface, causing a sudden loss of balance.

A trip happens when your leg or foot comes into contact with a hazard (either an object or an uneven surface) that arrests the movement of your lower body while momentum carries your upper body forward.

## What are the Two Types of Falls?

A fall happens when your center of gravity shifts unexpectedly, but for workplace safety purposes, falls are divided into two different categories: same-level falls and elevated falls.

An elevated fall is when someone falls from one level to another, like from a ladder, scaffold, building, or through an opening in the floor.

A same-level fall is when someone falls to the floor they're standing on or against a nearby object or wall.

## What are Examples of Slipping and Tripping Hazards?

There are many factors that can contribute to the likelihood of a slip or trip. Many slip or trip hazards are substances or objects that make a walking-working surface dangerous, but footwear and environmental conditions also play a part.

### Examples of Slip Hazards

Basically, anything that decreases the amount of friction between your foot and the walking surface increases the risk of slipping.

This includes:

- Water, ice, snow, mud, grease, oil, food, or other wet products on smooth floors
- Dust, powders, plastic wrapping, granules, or other dry products that are slippery on smooth floors
- Freshly waxed surfaces
- Highly polished surfaces that remain slick when dry (like concrete, marble, or ceramic)
- Loose or irregular surfaces like gravel or unanchored flooring
- Sloped walking surfaces without slip- or skid-resistance
- Muddy terrain
- Wet or dry leaves, pine needles, or plant debris
- Shoes with inadequate traction
- Soles that are wet, muddy, or greasy

As you can see, slip hazards can be found indoors or outdoors.

### Workplace Trip Hazard Examples

Officially, OSHA's trip hazard height is a quarter inch. Any change in floor level that is  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch or more constitutes a tripping hazard.

Examples of common tripping hazards include:

- Uncovered hoses, cables, wires, or cords across walking surfaces
- Obstacles or clutter on walking surfaces
- Furniture drawers/door left open
- Unmarked steps or ramps
- Damaged or irregular steps
- Rumpled carpets or mats (or curled edges)
- Thresholds, gaps, and other irregularities in walking surfaces
- Speed bumps and curb drops

Other factors can also contribute to the likelihood that you'll trip, including lack of coordination or an obstructed view of the walking surface. Many circumstances can contribute, including:

- Fatigue
- Being under the influence
- Bulky PPE
- Poor air quality
- Poor lighting
- Bulky loads
- Poor vision

## Slips, Trips, and Falls Prevention

Some slip, trip, and fall prevention measures are permanent, including:

- Adequate lighting



- Handrails
- Slip-resistant surfaces in high-risk areas
- Effective drainage, ventilation, and other methods to keep surfaces dry
- Marking the edges of steps or elevation changes

Other methods for preventing slips, trips, and falls require ongoing participation from workers, including:

- Proper footwear
- Safe work practices
- Frequent cleaning
- Good housekeeping practices that keep walkways free of clutter
- Noticing and marking slip or trip hazards

As a result, a lot of slip, trip, and fall prevention relies on the ability of your workforce to recognize slipping and tripping hazards, understand how to mitigate them, and know how to use safe work practices to minimize their risk.

Even though there's no formal OSHA requirement for Slip, Trip, and Fall training, workers need education and regular refreshers in OSHA trip hazards and regulations to accomplish all of this correctly.

One of the easiest and most effective ways to keep your workforce fresh on this topic is to use online courses from an OSHA-authorized training provider like us. We have a [Walking and Working Surface course](#) that your employees can take at their own convenience and pace. Get started today!

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