



Preventing Slips, Trips and Falls for Custodians

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Annually slips, trips and falls on the same level exact a substantial toll in terms of death, personal injury, personal suffering, workers compensation, loss in productivity and civil liability. The [2005 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index](#) indicates that falls on the same level was the second leading cause of all workplace injuries in 2003, accounting for 13.7% of total direct costs associated with workplace injuries or \$6.9 billion. Additionally, the National Safety Council estimates that worker compensation and medical costs associated with employee slip and fall accidents are approximately \$70 billion per year.

So it comes as no surprise that one of the most common hazards for cleaning personnel is slipping on wet floors or tripping over an object. That is why ISSA has made the prevention of slips, trips and falls one of the cornerstones of its alliance with OSHA. This article presents a checklist of common causes of slips and trips as well as some practical tips on how you can avoid such workplace incidents.

Slips. Slips occur where there is too little friction or traction between the footwear and the floor. Common causes of slips are:

- Wet or oily surfaces
- Occasional spills
- Weather hazards such as ice, rain, or snow
- Inappropriate footwear such as high heels or shoes with slick soles
- Loose, unanchored rugs or mats
- Floors or other surfaces that do not have some degree of traction in all areas

Trips. Trips happen when your foot strikes or hits an object, causing you to lose balance and eventually fall. Common causes of tripping are:

- Obstructed view
- Poor lighting
- Clutter
- Wrinkled carpeting
- Cables or cords laid across walkways
- Bottom drawers left open
- Uneven surfaces (such as thresholds or steps)

Prevention of Falls. Both slips and trips result from some kind of change in the contact between the feet and the floor surface. Good housekeeping, improvements to flooring, proper footwear, appropriate pace of walking, and proper visibility are all elements critical to preventing fall accidents.

Housekeeping. Good housekeeping is the first and most important step in preventing falls due to slips and trips. It includes the following practices.

- Periodically inspect floors for hazard (i.e. debris, spills, uneven or unsecure mats)
- Clean all spills immediately
- Mark spills and wet areas with warning signs and barricades
- Spread grease-absorbent compound on oily surfaces
- Mop or sweep debris from floors
- Remove obstacles from walkways and always keep them free of clutter
- Secure mats, rugs, and carpets that do not lay flat by tacking or taping them down
- Always close file cabinet or storage drawers
- Do not lay cords and cables across walkways, or at the very least cover such cords and cables with an appropriate device
- Keep working areas and walkways well lit
- Replace burned-out light bulbs and faulty switches

Without good housekeeping practices, other preventive measures such as installation of sophisticated flooring, specialty footwear, or training on techniques of walking will never be fully effective.

Flooring. Changing or modifying the flooring is the next level of preventing slips, trips, and falls. Floors can be modified by:

- Recoating or replacing floors
- Installing mats or pressure sensitive strips
- Applying an abrasive coating

It is critical to remember that high traction floor surfaces still require good housekeeping as much as any other flooring. In addition, resilient, nonslippery flooring prevents or reduces foot fatigue and contributes to slip-prevention measures.

Footwear. In workplaces where floors may be oily or wet, selecting and using proper footwear can play a significant role in preventing fall accidents. Please be aware that no footwear has antislip properties for every condition. Therefore, it is recommended that you check with your supplier or manufacturer of footwear to assist you in making the best selection.

When stripping floors, it is recommended that you wear “stripping shoes” to prevent slips and falls. Also properly fitted footwear increases comfort and prevents fatigue, which in turn improves safety for the employee.

Appropriate Walking Practices. People working in a rush can create situations that may lead to a slip, trip and/or fall. You can reduce the chances of a fall by taking the following actions when walking:

- Take your time and pay attention to where you are going
- Adjust your stride to a pace that is suited to the type of flooring and the tasks you are doing
- Walk with the feet pointed slightly outward
- Make wide turns at corners

Proper Visibility.

- Always use the available light sources to provide sufficient light for your tasks
- Use a flashlight if you enter a dark room
- Ensure that things you are carrying, pushing, or pulling do not prevent you from seeing any obstructions, spills, or other hazards.

This material was adapted from information provided by the California Department of Industrial Relations in its publication titled [Working Safer and Easier for Janitors, Custodians and Housekeepers](#). This publication is available in English and Spanish and can be ordered by going to the following URL: <http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/puborder.asp>

The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and ISSA have established an alliance to enhance the safety and health of workers throughout the cleaning industry. As part of this alliance, ISSA and OSHA will work together to communicate to the cleaning industry ways they can improve the safety and health of their employees and otherwise protect them from workplace hazards.

As the leading international trade association for the cleaning industry, ISSA's worldwide membership includes more than 5,000 distributor, manufacturer, building service contractor and in-house service provider members.