

Slips, Trips and Falls

OHS information for employers and workers

Purpose

It's amazing that we don't fall more often than we do. As our leg swings forward each time we take a step, our toe rushes past the ground at a speed of 14 to 18 km/hr and is often less than 1 cm above it. And as we land our heel, it normally slips forward along the ground for a distance of up to 2 cm without causing us to lose our balance.

To reduce the number of slips, trips and falls at your workplace, make sure you understand why they happen and use properly designed workspaces and work methods.

What Are Slips?

Slips most commonly occur when your heel strikes the ground and you transfer your body weight to the lead foot. If this foot slips out from under you, you lose your support base and fall. Although you may often manage to recover from slips, you can easily strain muscles while trying to regain your balance.

Many lower back injuries occur when a person carrying or lifting an object tries to recover from a slip or loss of balance. To prevent slips, workers should:

- Wear appropriate footwear and keep walking surfaces clean. Using high resistance surfaces as the answer to every slipping problem should be avoided — they can increase the potential for trips; and

- Walking surfaces should be suitable for the pushing, pulling and carrying tasks performed on them. They should provide adequate foot grip but allow wheels to roll freely. Rough, deeply textured surfaces may reduce the potential for slips but increase the potential for trips.

What Are Trips?

Trips are caused when your forward-moving leg suddenly and unexpectedly stops. Your body continues its forward motion but hasn't a foot on which to land, so you fall.

Abrupt changes in the height of a walking surface present a tripping hazard, even if the change is as little as 1 cm. Making the transition from a low-slip resistance surface such as a sand-covered loading ramp to a high-slip resistance surface such as a clean, dry, asphalt pad, can also cause you to trip.

Make a point of adapting your walking style to the surface. To prevent trips, workers should:

- Keep as few objects as possible on walking and working surfaces;
- Eliminate abrupt changes in walking surface height; and
- Where possible, replace stairs with ramps between levels. Be aware that when a ramp angle increases to as much as 20 degrees, the friction or slip resistance of the surface must increase approximately threefold in order to prevent slips.

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What Are Falls?

According to WCB-Alberta data, in 2015 20.5 percent of Alberta's workplace lost time claims were the result of falls as follows:

- 1) 13.9 percent – fall on same level;
- 2) 6.0 percent – fall to lower level;
- 3) 0.6 percent – other falls.

The severity of falls is often underestimated; serious injuries or death can result from falls of as little as one metre.

Unsafe ladder use, particularly in construction and maintenance, causes falls, but even stairs present a hazard. People lose their balance, slip on poor slip-resistant material on the nosing of the stair, or don't bother to use handrails, perhaps because they're carrying something.

Falls associated with the operation of vehicles and equipment are often the result of a combination of a slip, loss of balance, and misjudging the height of a surface or step. To prevent such falls, maintain three-point contact and use handles when available.

Same level falls – many inside falls are caused by slippery conditions related to:

- Poor housekeeping
 - Dirt, grease, or contaminants on floors
- Defects
 - Inappropriate floor surface materials
 - Surface wear
 - Uneven or damaged surfaces

Falls from stairs – many of these are caused by:

- Poor housekeeping;
- Defects or code violations;
 - Lack of handrails
 - Handrails at wrong height
 - Improper or changing tread/riser dimensions
- Tread surface material (descending vs ascending falls); and
- Poor lighting and visibility.

The majority of these falls are preventable.

How Do You Prevent Falls from Elevated Surfaces?

Falls from elevated work surfaces are often preceded by slips and trips. Apply the same prevention methods to elevated surfaces as for slips and trips on level surfaces. Include railings, guardrails, travel restraint, or fall arrest systems where necessary.

Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Report serious incidents, make immediate danger complaints, ask OHS questions

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

File a complaint online

ohsComplaintsPortal.labour.alberta.ca

Online incident reporting

Potentially serious, mine or mine site incidents

oir.labour.alberta.ca

Website

alberta.ca/OHS

Get copies of the *OHS Act*, Regulations and Code

Alberta Queen's Printer

qp.gov.ab.ca

Occupational Health and Safety

alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx

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