

Slips, Trips and Falls

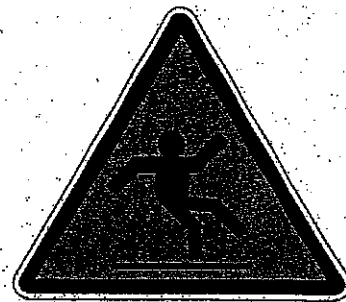
Winter Issue 2001

Have you ever slipped, tripped or fallen? Chances are that at one time or another, you have. Slips and trips happen to be among the most frequent types of accidents and falls are the number two leading cause of unintentional death (Source: National Safety Council Injury Facts, 1999 Edition).

As a provider agency, you are very susceptible to the hazards of slips, trips and falls, due to the nature of your agency and the extent of services that you may provide. While auto losses continue to dominate the Irwin Siegel Agency's overall Human Services Program, slips, trips and falls take the lead in general liability losses.

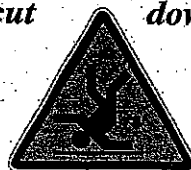
CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING SCENARIOS:

- ◆ A consumer at a community residence walks into a bathroom with a wet floor.
- ◆ A staff member walks past a garbage can lid sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor.
- ◆ A staff member uses an improper transfer method to assist a consumer moving from his wheelchair onto the toilet.
- ◆ A neighbor walks across an icy sidewalk in front of a community residence.
- ◆ A maintenance man uses a defective, old ladder to do some work on the ceiling in one of the workshops.
- ◆ At the central office, an administrative assistant bumps into a low file drawer that has been left open.
- ◆ A customer steps over a shirt and hanger on the floor of a thrift store.
- ◆ A customer walks across a wet floor at a local store that the agency has a cleaning contract with.

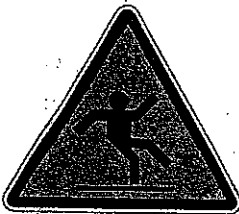


IN ALL OF THESE SCENARIOS, SOMEONE IS AT RISK FOR A SLIP, TRIP, OR FALL.

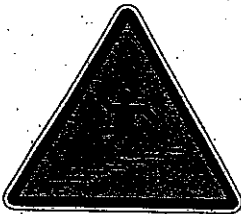
While these situations occur all the time, fortunately not all of the situations will result in a slip, trip or fall. By cutting down on the number of hazardous situations that you see in your agency, you will greatly cut down on the number of incidents that may occur.



FALLS are broken out into two different types, same-level and elevated falls. While elevated falls are the most severe, same level falls are the most frequent.



SAME-LEVEL FALLS include both slips and trips. Slips are primarily caused by a slippery walking surface and are compounded by wearing the wrong footwear. Trips can occur with as little as a 3/8" rise in the walkway or a flight of stairs with only a slight difference in the height of the steps.



ELEVATED FALLS include falls from ladders, vehicles, loading docks, and stairs.

At this point, you may be asking yourself how you can prevent injuries from slips, trips and falls. The solution is quite simple, if you follow some very basic procedures.

- ◆ All walking, working and living areas should be kept clean and tidy.
- ◆ Keep walking areas free of obstacles. In workshop settings, you can paint yellow lines to identify working and walking areas and ensure that supplies, trash, etc. are never placed in these "yellow" areas.
- ◆ Spills of food, water, grease or other liquid, should be cleaned up immediately.
- ◆ In areas where the surface is likely to be slippery, use non-skid strips, mats or floor coatings. This is especially true in bathrooms, as tub or shower floors and tiled bathroom floors can become extremely slippery when wet.

- ◆ Provide sturdy handrails on both sides of stairways and ramps.
- ◆ Spread sand on icy walkways and parking lots during the winter.
- ◆ Ensure that lighting is adequate and even.
- ◆ Either tack down or place a rubber, slip-resistant mat under any large or small rugs.
- ◆ Repair any loose or uneven tiles, bricks, pavement, carpeting, stair treads or floorboards.
- ◆ Arrange furniture in the office or home so that there are wide aisles and no obstacles.
- ◆ Store materials in closets or cabinets and never in hallways, walkways, or stairways.
- ◆ Pick up anything that doesn't belong in the walkway, such as a trash bag, pencil, towel, etc.
- ◆ Keep drawers and cabinet or closet doors closed.
- ◆ Never run electrical cords or extension cords across walkways.
- ◆ Use a properly balanced step-ladder and avoid "make shifts" (stacks of furniture or boxes as ladders).

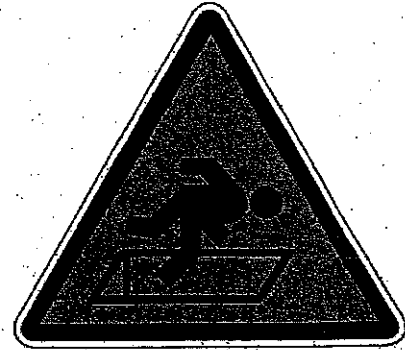


***Your Behavior Can Also
Greatly Reduce Your Risk of
a Slip, Trip or Fall***

- ◆ Learn to walk slowly and sure-footedly.
- ◆ Pay attention to where you are going.
- ◆ Avoid taking shortcuts.
- ◆ Be sure to change direction slowly, as rapid changes in direction can also cause slips and trips.
- ◆ Use extra caution when walking across smooth floors that have been waxed or may be icy. Take slow, short steps with your toes pointed slightly outward.
- ◆ Watch out for hidden steps. Sometimes when walking through a doorway, there may be a drop or rise of several inches that may not be noticeable.
- ◆ Do not carry materials that may obstruct your vision or that may be too heavy for you to carry safely.
- ◆ Use handrails whenever walking up or down stairs or ramps.
- ◆ Turn the light on first when you walk into a dark room, even if you stay for only a moment.
- ◆ Always lower yourself from elevations, such as docks, trucks, or work stages, never jump.
- ◆ If you see debris lying on the floor, don't ignore it, pick it up!



***As a Provider Agency, Policies and
Procedures Should Be
Implemented to Reduce the
Number of Slip,
Trip and Fall Risks.***



***These policies and procedures
should include:***

- ◆ Management's commitment to prevent accidental slips, trips and falls.
- ◆ Regular, frequent inspections of all agency areas, including working and walking surfaces, housekeeping, and lighting.
- ◆ Teach employees and consumers about the importance of wearing proper footwear for their work and environment. For instance, what you would wear in a workshop and an office, or even during the summer or winter, will be very different.
- ◆ All slips, trips and falls, with or without injury should be reported, recorded and investigated thoroughly. Corrective action should be taken to prevent such a repeat occurrence.
- ◆ Job descriptions for all employees should include the correction of unsafe conditions, including clearing corridors, cleaning up spills, wiping bathroom floors and addressing snow and ice removal.
- ◆ Provide the equipment necessary for staff to ensure a safe environment, such as mops, buckets, paper towels, cloth towels, wet floor signs, sand, salt, shovels, etc.

The scenarios that were discussed earlier in this bulletin can be easily corrected by alert supervisors.

- ◆ The manager of a community residence can set up guidelines for the staff. The bathrooms need to be checked after each shower. If the floor is wet, mop it up, put up a wet floor sign and crack the window open for faster drying. The wet floor sign should block the doorway and consumers should be advised.
- ◆ The manager also purchases a new garbage can with an attached lid that is opened with a lever to replace the garbage can with a removable lid. This will avoid the temptation to take the lid off after dinner so that leftovers can be easily tossed.
- ◆ The responsibility of snow removal is delegated by the manager of the community residence, as well as guidelines for salting the sidewalk and other walkways along with the emergency fire exits.
- ◆ The manager of the community residence provides training on proper consumer transfers from wheelchair to toilet, bed to wheelchair, etc.
- ◆ The director of the workshop speaks with the maintenance man using the old ladder and assigns him to go out to buy a new one immediately.
- ◆ The office manager can hold a meeting at the central office on slip and fall hazards. Discussion should include the proper opening and closing of file drawers and appropriate footwear.
- ◆ The manager of the thrift store can discuss the importance of keeping the stores aisles clean and assign store employees to check the aisles and under clothing racks for debris, clothing items and hangers that are lying on the floor.
- ◆ The provider agency should have the maintenance contract with the store reviewed by legal counsel before signing onto a job. The contract should state when the provider agency wants to clean the floor

(i.e. after business hours) and which floors are to be cleaned. The contract should also state that the hiring company will be responsible for notifying the necessary persons that the floors will be cleaned/waxed at the above stated time. The contract should also state how the floors will be treated, including what type of cleaning agent or wax and what cautions will be used, such as placing a "Wet Floor" sign at each entrance to the treated area and having those signs stay in place for three hours. Hold Harmless Agreements will also reduce the legal hazard between the provider agency and the contracting company. A "hold harmless agreement" should be brought up in negotiating the agreement with the company. This will not, however, affect the possibility of an individual suing you.

- ◆ Safety procedures should be established for any employees or consumers who will be completing the maintenance contract. Procedures should include: reading and following cautions listed on the cleaning product or wax; use of a non-rub, self-polishing wax, otherwise the floors will have to be polished to thoroughly eliminate undue slipperiness; and availability of equipment such as proper cleaning agents/wax, wet floor signs, mops, etc.

While not every slip, trip and fall incident will be averted, by setting and following the procedures listed above, you can greatly decrease your chances for an incident occurring at your agency. This bulletin has not covered every slip, trip and fall hazard, but alert staff and consumers can identify hazards. Once hazards are identified, steps should be taken to correct them.