



## A GUIDE FOR PREVENTING SLIP AND FALL ACCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Slips and falls are the number one cause of school workplace accidents and are also a leading cause of general liability claims. The bulk of these claims result from six causes: stairs, ladders, snow and ice, outdoor surfaces, footwear, and wet surfaces.

### STAIRS

The most common causes of stairway falls are distractions, poor lighting, rushing, carrying heavy or bulky items, and not using handrails. Follow these tips to help avoid falls on stairways.

- Use the handrails to stabilize yourself; missing a step when descending a stairway can cause a fall, resulting in serious injury
- Take your time when going up or down stairs
- Carrying bulky loads on stairs is risky; take multiple, smaller trips
- Do not leave objects on or near the stairs, as those objects can create obstacles that are difficult for others to see

### LADDERS

If you need to retrieve something beyond your reach, you should use a ladder or stepstool rather than improvising with a piece of furniture such as a desk or a chair. However, ladders can pose their own hazards if used incorrectly.

- Before stepping on a ladder, inspect it for defects that could make it unstable
- Ensure the ladder has level footing; if another person is present, have them hold the ladder steady
- Make sure the ladder has an adequate load rating and is of adequate height for the specific task
- Never stand on the top rung of a ladder
- Avoid positioning the ladder in a heavy-traffic area where someone could bump into it

### SNOW AND ICE

The majority of outdoor slips and falls occur during cold weather months when temperatures are warm enough during the day to melt snow, but cold in the evening causing the melted snow to refreeze. This presents a dangerous and often hard-to-spot hazard: black ice. Because black ice forms overnight, it's important to check on walkway conditions early in the morning before pedestrian traffic picks up. If black ice is present, mark the area with cones to alert passersby and treat the walkway with ice melt or traction aids, such as sand or poultry grit.

You can also help prevent winter slips and falls by:

- Having an inclement weather plan in place before it becomes necessary
- Working with in-house safety personnel or hiring a third-party snow removal service and determining how often they will remove snow to a designated collection area
- Assigning maintenance staff to monitor the walking surfaces on school property during wintertime, and encouraging all employees to report icy or slippery spots
- Clearing parking lots and sidewalks before staff members arrive and continuously monitoring the area
- Creating an inspection checklist and establishing reporting protocols

## OUTDOOR SURFACES

Sidewalks and parking lots are two of the most common spots for school slip and fall accidents. Changes in sidewalk elevation as small as ¼-inch and potholes in parking lots can cause a person to trip. Inspect parking lots and sidewalks for cracks, potholes and other damage and make necessary repairs as soon as possible. In the meantime, block off the hazard with cones or caution tape. Temporarily marking hazards with high visibility paint can also help draw attention to changes in elevation. Be sure to add traction material to paint to reduce slickness.

## APPROPRIATE FOOTWEAR

Worn-down and risky footwear account for 25% of all slip and fall accidents. Remind your staff to wear footwear appropriate for the day's weather conditions. Safer options include shoes with flat heels, multichannel tread and rubber soles. Avoid raised heels or shoes with leather soles, worn heels or open backs. Staff should also be encouraged to wear winter boots while outdoors and then change into their indoor footwear.

## WET SURFACES

The most critical area for slip and fall prevention in buildings is the first 15-20 feet inside the entrance where moisture is often tracked in. To help properly absorb wetness from shoes, make sure you have adequate mat coverage. Place scraper mats outside of the building and water-absorbent mats inside each building entrance. Custodians should maintain these mats to ensure they are not a hazard themselves. Replace cracked, displaced or damaged mats as soon as possible.

If you notice a spill or pooled water, clean it up immediately or place a caution sign while you report it. However, be sure to remove the sign once the area is dry. Signs that are left up for too long will be ignored and can become trip hazards themselves.

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