

Winter's worst for slips, trips

Slips and falls cause an estimated 15-20 percent of workplace injuries— and most of them can be prevented. As temperatures drop, the risk of slips and falls rises, but a few important actions can make a big difference to everyone's safety.

Some of winter's hazardous conditions are obvious:

- Snowy and ice-covered sidewalks or pathways.
- Slippery indoor surfaces due to water, ice or snow brought in by foot traffic.
- Melted snow or ice, or grit at the entrance of buildings.
- Black ice (a thin, nearly invisible coating of ice on paved surfaces caused when temperatures rise above freezing during the day and drop below freezing at night).
- Obstructed sidewalks and roadways.

Other hazards might not come immediately to mind. Certain types of footwear (such as high heels or leather-soled shoes) may be designed for warmth but can still be a problem. Carrying items that are too large or heavy can affect your balance or obstruct your view. A hat or scarf could block your view or make it difficult to hear traffic.

Visibility is also affected by the fact there is a lot less daylight at this time of year.

Don't get caught by surprise — monitor the weather and expect slippery conditions. Wear appropriate winter footwear that is well-insulated and waterproof, with a non-slip, thick rubber sole and a wide, low heel. Ice grippers can also improve walking on ice and snow.

Here are some more tips for being a “defensive walker” during winter:

- Walk slowly and never run on frozen ground.



- Keep both hands free for balance rather than in your pockets.
- Use handrails from start to finish.
- Avoid carrying loads.
- Keep your eyes on where you are going.
- Test potentially slick areas by tapping your foot on them.
- Step, don't jump, from vehicles or equipment.
- Walk on sidewalks whenever possible. If you must walk on the street, do so against the flow of traffic and as close to the curb as possible.

Sometimes, there is no choice about walking on ice. If you cannot avoid it:

- Take short steps or shuffle for stability.
- Bend slightly, walk flat-footed with your center of gravity directly over the feet as much as possible.
- Be prepared to fall. If you do, fall with sequential contacts at your thigh, hip and shoulder to avoid using your arms to protect against breakage.

- Roll with the fall. Try to twist and roll backwards, rather than falling forward.
- Relax as much as possible when you begin to fall.
- Lean forward so you won't slam your head on the pavement as your feet shoot out from under you.
- Toss the load you are carrying. Protect yourself instead of the objects being carried.

When you are around buildings, check overhead for ice hazards (roofs, electric lines, etc.) Be especially cautious around entrances, loading docks, curbs and other areas where ice can form.

Whenever possible avoid north-facing entrances as these areas tend to remain icy and slippery longer.

Wipe your feet before entering a building and before climbing steps. Cold boots or footwear with snow or ice caught on the soles can become quite slippery when you enter a warm building.

You can help reduce the number of icy spots by spreading salt/sand where needed.

It's one thing to get from home to comfortable indoor surroundings — but working outdoors during winter can mean constant exposure to slippery conditions.

Ice and snow should be cleared from access areas and work platforms. Simply turning icy planks over might not be sufficient, because ice often forms on the underside. Steel beams, decks and platforms might be clear in sunny areas, but icy in the shade.

Remove icicles, especially if the weather starts to warm up. If they cannot be removed, rope off the area below them and put up warning signs.

To protect yourself and others, make sure frost and snow is cleared from all windows, mirrors and lights on vehicles and heavy equipment.