

examinetics

Occupational Health Pathfinder

Slips, trips and falls

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Overview

It is estimated that 300,000 disabling injuries occur each year in the American work force, resulting in 1,400 worker deaths. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that, in 2006, the number of falls (non-fatal) that occurred in private industry in the US was approximately 234,000 with 789 fatalities. Further, it is estimated that slips, trips and falls account for 15 to 20 percent of all workers' compensation costs.

Factors contributing to slips, trips and falls

There are many ways in which slips, trips or falls occur in the workplace. Factors such as flooring, environment, obstacles, contamination (with dry or wet agents) and inadequate footwear can all add to the risk of injury. Flooring should be free from obstruction, fitted properly and have a surface appropriate to the work activities taking place on it; for example, a non-slip surface where processes involving wet materials occur. Environmental factors that should be addressed include lighting (whether too dark or light) and surfaces in bad weather conditions such as rainfall, condensation or ice. Surface contamination including spills from solvents, oils or dusts all contribute to worker slips or falls. Selecting the correct ladder and utilizing safety equipment such as harnesses, guardrail systems and safety net systems lessens the risks of falls from elevation.

Proper footwear should be worn at all times and must be comfortable and durable. Wearing the correct footwear can protect workers against rolling objects or electrical hazards and also provide protection against slips. Treads on the soles of shoes are as important as the material from which the footwear is made.

Regulatory issues

OSHA outlines the general requirement for 'Walking-Working surfaces' in the Standard for General Industry (29 CFR 1910). 'Housekeeping' rules state that all workplaces should be kept clean and tidy and that floors should be kept dry. Where wet processes occur, there should be adequate drainage and protective surfaces such as mats or false floors. Aisles and passageways should be marked and kept clear of obstruction. Pits, holes, ditches, vats and tanks should be fitted with covers or guardrails to prevent falls.

The American Society of Safety Engineers also provides standard ASSE/ANSI A1264.2 - Standard for the Provision of Slip Resistance on Walking/Working Surfaces. Employers should research regulatory issues thoroughly and understand those that relate to specific industries (such as those for construction, covered in 20 CFR 1926) in addition to those laid out for the General industry.

KEY POINT SUMMARY:

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that, in 2006, the number of falls (non-fatal) that occurred in private industry was approximately 234,000 with 789 fatalities
- Factors such as flooring, environment, obstacles, contamination and inadequate footwear all contribute to slips, trips and falls
- Flooring should be free from obstruction and should have a surface appropriate to the work activities taking place on it
- Environmental factors include lighting (too dark or light) and bad weather conditions such as condensation or icy surfaces
- Surface contamination including spills from solvents, oils or dusts all contribute to worker slips
- Selecting the correct ladder and utilizing safety equipment such as harnesses and guardrails lessens the risks of falls from elevation
- Wearing the correct footwear can protect workers against rolling objects or electrical hazards & also provide protection against slips

FIND OUT MORE...

OSHA website

Preventing fatal falls in construction
www.osha.gov/doc/falls/preventingfalls.html

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls/

Business Owner Briefing

"Preventing injuries from slips, trips and falls" (University of Florida IFAS, 2006)

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/AS/AS04200.pdf>

Medical Director Review

"Research on Slip Resistance Measurements — a New Challenge" (Kim and Nagata, 2008)

www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/indhealth/46/1/66/_pdf

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