TECHNICAL UPDATE

CTSI
Serving Colorado's Counties

Volume 25 Number 7 February 15, 2021

Take Steps to Prevent Winter Slips and Falls

According to the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), slips, trips, and falls cause the majority of general industry accidents and 15% of accidental deaths. Each winter, CTSI receives multiple incident reports about county employees being injured by slips and falls while working in icy conditions. In fact, it is the leading cause of injuries in the County Workers' Compensation Pool. Many of these injuries could be prevented by wearing high-traction footwear or by adding ice cleats to traditional footwear. Ice cleats are devices with small spikes or high traction materials that can be affixed to boots or shoes with rubber straps. The cleats can be easily removed and can provide extra traction for employees working outdoors, such as road and bridge crews.

TYPES OF ICE CLEATS

There are several types of ice cleats designed to meet specific needs. Retail ice cleats, such as those found at outdoor suppliers, are best suited for occasional use during hiking and other winter outdoor activities. Several companies manufacture heavy-duty ice cleats specifically designed for long-term, industrial use. Industrial ice cleats are more durable and have models designed to fit over insulated or over-sized work boots. They have a higher price point than retail models, but this is often balanced by their increased longevity and specialized features.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

When choosing the best type of ice cleat for employee use, consider what job duties the employees will be performing while wearing the cleats. Will they need to drive? Will they need to transition from outside to inside frequently throughout the day? Several manufacturers make transitional ice cleats that use abrasive materials or low-profile cleats that allow wearers to drive or walk indoors without removing the cleats constantly.

TYPES AND LEVELS OF TRACTION

There are no standard regulations or guidelines for ice cleats, but, in general, they can be categorized by what contacts the walking surface (e.g., studs/spikes, screws, coils, chains, grit, etc.) and by the level of traction.

- Super aggressive level traction cleats have sharp metal spikes and are best suited for ice climbing or similar activities. They are rarely used in the workplace.
- Working-level traction is designed for employees who spend hours outdoors. They usually use studs or screws and are unsafe for indoor walking.
- Walking level traction is best suited for employees who occasionally walk outdoors in ice and snow. This level uses fewer cleats.
- Transitional level traction increases traction above a typical sole while remaining safe to wear indoors or while driving.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COUNTIES

Slips and falls are a serious risk to county employees, and taking steps to address them should be part of a comprehensive prevention program that includes ice cleats and other traction devices. For more information about implementing a slip and fall prevention program or about choosing the right ice cleats for county employees, contact CTSI Loss Control at 303 861 0507.

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