



TECHNICAL UPDATE

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STEPPING UP SAFETY IN WORKPLACE FALLS

In workplaces across various industries, falls represent significant hazards that can result in injuries, productivity losses, and even fatalities. However, with proactive measures and a focus on prevention, employers can create safer environments for their county employees.

In the County Workers' Compensation Pool, slip, trip, and fall accidents are the top cause of employee injury... almost double that of body mechanics and lifting combined, the next two most common injury types. Falls can occur on level ground, such as slipping on an icy walkway, or tripping over an object, or from a different level, like falling off of a ladder. Risk factors also include uneven surfaces, improper footwear, and lack of safety signage.

IMPLEMENT SAFETY MEASURES

There are things you can do to lower the risk of slip, trip, and fall injuries. Most falls are caused by hazards, defined as any unsafe condition that can result in an accident. Keeping a worksite clear of hazards by using the precautions below can help prevent accidents:

- Promptly clean up any spills
- Keep walkways clear and free of clutter
- Use proper step-stools or ladders
- Only carry loads you can safely handle
- Make sure lighting is adequate

DEALING WITH ICY CONDITIONS

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 and can easily be removed.

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, which are more durable and designed to fit over insulated or oversized work boots. They have a higher price point than retail models, but this is often balanced by their increased longevity and specialized features.

When choosing the best type of ice cleat, 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 repeatedly. Depending on the circumstance, ice cleats can also be worn on one foot to allow for partial traction and operating the pedal of a vehicle.

The following steps can help you minimize the risk of slip, trip, and fall accidents due to icy surfaces:

- Walk flat-footed, like a duck, or on the balls of your feet, not your heels
- Avoid routes that have not been cleared or appear to be glazed over
- Avoid carrying large objects that can obstruct your view or cause you to lose your balance
- Traction devices, like ice cleats, should be worn by employees whose duties take them outdoors
- Avoid using traction devices inside on smooth surfaces, like tile or concrete floors



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COUNTIES

Each winter, CTSI receives multiple incident reports about county employees being injured while working in icy conditions. Slips and falls are a serious risk to employees, and taking steps to address them should be part of a comprehensive prevention program that safeguards against accidents. For more information about implementing a prevention program or advice on choosing the right footwear for county employees, contact CTSI at (303) 861-0507.