

# Slips, and Trips, and Falls, Oh My!

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Did you know that one-quarter of workplace injuries that result in missed workdays occur in a split-second, and are *preventable*? The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) states that [26% of all nonfatal workplace injuries](#) that resulted in missed workdays in 2017 were related to slips, trips, and falls. Unintentional falls are the leading cause of nonfatal emergency department visits across the United States, amongst all age groups except ages 10 to 24, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control [data for 2017](#). Commit to keeping your staff, volunteers, and customers out of the emergency room—and your organization out of financial, legal, and reputational distress—by following best practices for preventing slips, trips, and falls.

Fall-related injuries and fatalities result in devastating costs to US workers, their families, employers, and the health care system.

- The National Safety Council estimates that the US is burdened by \$70 billion in annual costs related to occupational fall incidents, including workers' compensation and medical costs.
- In 2016-2017, slips, trips, and falls were the [third leading cause of most costly workers' compensation claims](#) after motor vehicle incidents and burns. All three types of injury resulted in workers compensation costs higher than average, with a typical slip, trip, and fall incident resulting on average in costs of \$46,592 including \$19,805 in indemnity costs and \$26,787 in medical costs according to the National Council on Compensation Insurance's Workers Compensation Statistical Plan database.
- [Consumernotice.org](#) reports that, "workplace injuries from slips, trips, and falls result in more than 260,000 missed workdays a year. The average worker misses 11 days of work following such injuries."
- The [CDC estimates the annual cost of ladder injuries](#)—including falls off ladders and stools—in the US is \$24 billion, including costs related to work loss, medical, legal, liability, and pain and suffering expenses.
- Multiple sources report that more than 17% of all disabling occupational injuries result from falls, most of which were preventable.

## Heights and Haunting Hazards

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Falls, slips, and trips were the third leading cause of fatal work-related injuries in 2018, after transportation incidents and violence caused by people or animals, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau calculated that slips, trips, and falls in 2018 caused about 15% of fatal work-related injuries. In 2018, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimated that [more than 240,000 people](#) visited emergency rooms in the United States because of injuries related to the use of ladders or stools. To reduce risk of fatal falls from ladders or stools in your own workplace, refer to these helpful resources:

- [Falling Off Ladders Can Kill: Use Them Safely](#) (OSHA)
- [Ladder Safety Tips](#) (Safe-Wise Consulting)

[The National Safety Council \(NSC\) reports that](#) “in 2016, 697 workers died in falls to a lower level, and 48,060 were injured badly enough to require days off work. A worker doesn’t have to fall from a high level to suffer fatal injuries; 134 workers were killed in falls on the same level in 2016, according to *Injury Facts* (a NSC publication).” Employers and their stakeholders might be surprised that same-level falls result in deaths and severe injuries. In fact, most falls happen as a result of slips and trips on same-level walking surfaces, and the majority of fall-related injuries occur from these types of falls. While falls from a height certainly present a higher risk for injury and death, all types of falls can potentially result in these tragic outcomes.

Slips, trips, and falls can happen at any type of workplace and in any job—even desk jobs that appear to be low-risk. A major challenge of preventing fall-related injuries is the sheer number of hazards that increase the risk for slips, trips, and falls in the workplace. Reducing exposure to such hazards will potentially reduce the likelihood, frequency, and severity of fall-related injuries and deaths, as will education and reminders directed towards stakeholders most likely to be impacted by these hazards. If stakeholders naively believe they are safe from falling while walking or standing on flat surfaces, then they might be more vulnerable to workplace hazards.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety has distinguished between slips and trips, and identified [common causes of each event](#):

Slips happen where there is too little friction or traction between the footwear and the walking surface. Common causes of slips are:

- Wet or oily surfaces
- Occasional spills
- Weather hazards
- Loose, unanchored rugs or mats
- Flooring or other walking surfaces that do not have the same degree of traction in all areas
- Trips can happen when your foot collides (strikes, hits) an object causing you to lose balance and eventually fall.

Common causes of tripping are:

- Obstructed view
- Poor lighting
- Clutter in your way
- Wrinkled carpeting
- Uncovered cables
- Bottom drawers not being closed
- Uneven walking surfaces (steps, thresholds).

Begin identifying and addressing more workplace hazards using the Self-Inspection checklist in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) [Small Business Handbook](#).

While most adults might be generally aware of hazards like these, on-the-job pressures and stressors might cause workers to rush, make errors, or even ignore obvious hazards in order to complete their tasks. When work tasks and safety represent competing priorities, team members might knowingly put themselves at risk. Organization-

al leaders must demonstrate respect for safety expectations and safety practices in order to set an example for others. Praising team members who prioritize safety will show all staff that their contributions and their lives are assets worth protecting.

## Preventing Fall-Related Injuries

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Countless informational resources are available from leading safety agencies and consultants to help organizations manage their own risk, while protecting their stakeholders from dangerous slips, trips, and falls. Explore these free resources to ramp up your fall-prevention program before another incident occurs.

- [Ladder Safety Mobile App Resources](#) \*Download the actual app from the Apple Store or Google Play on your mobile device (NIOSH)
- [Falls in the Workplace Resource Library](#) (NIOSH)
- [Fall Safety Resources](#) (National Safety Council)
- [Fall Prevention Campaign and Resources](#) (OSHA)
- [Infographic: Slips, Trips and Falls Prevention](#) (Graphic Products)
- [Fall Prevention Safety Tips](#) (Safe-Wise Consulting)

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