# Talks ZONE



# Avoiding winter slips and falls

Bruises, broken limbs, cracked ribs, serious back or head injuries, and sometimes death — any of these can happen when a worker slips or trips and falls. The risk is even greater during winter, which should come as no surprise, yet many people don't take it as seriously as they should.

Although winter conditions are a fact of life in much of North America, people often get caught off-guard when conditions turn frigid. They don't dress properly, they walk too quickly on slippery surfaces and they carry objects that are too large or heavy, obstructing their view and affecting their balance.

Preventing personal injury means monitoring the weather, being on the lookout for hazardous conditions and taking precautions that are simple, but necessary.

Hazards include:

- Snowy and ice-covered sidewalks, paths and parking lots.
- 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.
- Certain types of footwear, such as high heels and leather-soled shoes.
- A hat or scarf that blocks your view or makes it difficult to hear traffic.

What you wear should not only keep you warm and dry, it must also help make you a 'defensive walker.' It is much easier to stay on your feet when they are inside shoes or boots that have a non-slip, thick rubber sole and a wide, low heel in addition to being well-insulated and waterproof.

Ice grippers on footwear can help you walk on hard-packed snow and ice, but grippers can become dangerously slippery and must be removed before walking on

smooth surfaces such as stone, tile and ceramic.

Here are some defensive walking tips:

- Give yourself sufficient time and plan your route.
- Walk in designated walkways as much as possible. Don't take shortcuts or go over snow banks.
- Take smaller steps and walk slowly.
- Bend slightly, walk flat-footed with your center of gravity directly over the feet as much as possible.
- Keep both hands free for balance rather than in your pockets.
- Use handrails from start to finish.
- Keep your eyes on where you are going.
- Be prepared to fall, and 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.
- If you are carrying a load, toss it. Protecting yourself is more important than trying to hang onto it.

When you arrive at work, it may be advisable to check overhead for ice hazards (building roofs, electric lines, etc.) Be especially cautious around building entrances, loading docks, curbs and other areas where ice can form.

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 in a warm building.

Good housekeeping is a year-round requirement. Unless custodial personnel are available to do it, help keep walking surfaces clear of debris, ice and slippery materials. If sand, salt or other materials are on hand to reduce the number of icy spots, use them.

Special care is required when exiting vehicles and equipment — don't jump from them. Look down at the surface. If it's coated with ice you might want to park in a different place.

Some additional safe procedures:

- Use the vehicle for support. Where practicable, brace yourself with the door and seat back before standing.
- When climbing in or out of a vehicle, face it whenever practical, and always use the three-point contact rule (either one hand and two feet in contact with the vehicle, or two hands and one foot).
- Use the access steps, footholds, handholds and rails provided on the vehicle to support you.

All slip, trip and fall hazards that you cannot deal with promptly should be reported to your supervisor. If your immediate supervisor is not available, report the hazard to the next level of supervision. Do not wait for someone else to do it.

# The Quiz

**These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.**

1. Workers face a greater risk of slips and falls during winter.
   TRUE ____ FALSE ____

2. Does preventing slips and falls require complicated precautions?
   YES ____ NO ____

3. Which of these are typical winter slip and fall hazards:
   A. Snowy and ice-covered sidewalks.
   B. Oil spills.
   C. Improper footwear.
   D. Black ice.
   E. All of the above

4. Footwear with thick leather soles and narrow heels is advisable when walking on snow and ice.
   TRUE ____ FALSE ____

5. Which of these are 'defensive walking' measures:
   A. Take short, slow steps.
   B. Keep both hands out of your pockets.
   C. Bend slightly, with your center of gravity over your feet.
   D. Use handrails from start to finish.
   E. All of the above.

6. Ice grippers help you walk on smooth surfaces such as stone or tile.
   TRUE ____ FALSE ____

7. Which of these things should you try to do if you start to fall:
   A. Roll with the fall, making contact with thigh, hip and shoulder to avoid using an arm and possibly breaking it.
   B. Try to fall backward, rather than forward.
   C. If you are carrying something, hang onto it tightly.
   D. All of the above.

8. Does your workplace have an employee or employees responsible for identifying and dealing with slip and fall hazards?
   YES ____ NO ____ DON'T KNOW____

***ANSWERS:*** 1. True, 2. No, 3. A., B. and D., 4. False, 5. E., 6. False, 7. A. and B., 8. Your answer



## Hold These Thoughts

Ensuring your winter boots fit properly while providing the appropriate support you require is critical to having feet that are both warm and comfortable.

A boot that is too tight or short may lead to cold feet. When consulting a footwear expert, don't be surprised if you end up being fit in a winter boot in a half size bigger than your regular footwear. The larger size allows for a layer of warm air to surround your foot inside the boot, keeping you warmer.

Be sure to try on boots with the same thickness of sock you plan to wear in them. Ideally, the socks should be made of a moisture wicking material like polypropylene, acrylic or wool that creates a dry layer against your skin. Cotton socks should be avoided as they hold moisture against the skin — a recipe for cold feet and potential frostbite.

Some key features to consider:

- Removable insoles allow you to properly remove and dry insoles between uses or remove completely to accommodate a custom-made orthotic.
- Rubber soles provide secure traction and stability in cold temperatures to help prevent slips or falls. A lower heel and wider outsole provide the broadest base of support.
- Laces provide the most adjustability and support in boots for walking and overall comfort. Velcro straps offer moderate support and pull-on styles offer much less.
- Firm heel counter provides ankle and heel support to help prevent foot and leg fatigue, as well as an added sense of security and confidence while walking.
- Choose boots that have been treated to be waterproof or ideally, styles that have a waterproof breathable membrane such as Gore-Tex that allows your feet to breathe while keeping moisture out.

# For the Record

Date of Meeting: _____ Topic: _____
Location: _____ Department:_____
Start Time: _____ Finish Time: _____ Meeting Leader: _____

In Attendance:

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# It really happened...

Statistics show that a majority of workplace falls happen because of a slip or trip on the same level. Falls from heights, while less frequent, can be a lot more devastating. The risk can rise as temperatures drop.

In one recent incident, workers were installing a bracket system on the roof of a four-storey building. They had postponed working on it so the sun could melt some of the heavy frost that had developed overnight on the plywood sheathing. After the fall protection lifeline system was installed and inspected, the workers tied off to the lifeline and started working on the roof.

One of the workers unhooked his lanyard from the lifeline while moving the metal bars for the bracket system. He found two of the 10-foot (three-meter) bars that were frozen together and struck them on the roof to break them apart. One of the bars started to slide towards the roof edge. As the worker reached to grab it, he slipped on frost, sliding 22 feet (6.5 meters) down the roof before falling 53 feet (16 meters) to the ground below. He died from severe injuries.

Aside from the need to ensure that personal fall protection equipment is used properly at all times, this tragedy underscores the value of taking special precautions when working on icy or wet roof surfaces. When there is overnight frost, consider covering roof work areas with tarps at the end of the workday. The frosty tarps can then be removed before work begins the next morning.