**How to Reduce Slips, Trips, and Falls in the Workplace**

By GB Risk Control

Most every slip, trip, and fall involves improper workplace housekeeping or lack of proper maintenance. If you start with “Standard Operating Practices” for housekeeping, you can empower employees to create positive change. Through employee observations, such practices can identify slip, trip, and fall risks that can be corrected immediately by the “observing” employee, trained maintenance, or housekeeping personnel. To reduce slips, trips and falls, follow these quick measures to create safer walking and working surfaces in your environment.

To begin, create good “Standard Operating Practices.” You should be aware that housekeeping could account for more than 16% of your fall injuries. When your facility’s housekeeping habits are poor, the result can easily be a higher incidence of employee injuries, creating an ever-increasing risk of insurance costs and regulatory citations. If an organization’s facilities are noticeably clean and well organized, it is a sustainability measure of the effectiveness of your safety program. Consider proper housekeeping as a routine job function, an ongoing procedure as part of each worker’s daily performance and measures.

Next, focus on reducing wet or slippery surfaces—typically this is where 25% of fall injuries occur, as reported by state agencies. Evaluate the high-risk surface areas like parking lots, sidewalks (or lack of), food preparation areas, shower stalls in residential dorms, and floors in general. Try to keep parking lots and sidewalks clean and in good repair. In areas where winter sets in, vigilantly maintain the walking surfaces when snow and ice are present. If too dangerous, it may be necessary to suspend use of the area until the hazards are eliminated or controlled by the use of adhesive striping material, anti-skid paint, or similar engineering control.

Indoor control measures will help reduce the incidence of slips, trips or falls.  When water is tracked in by pedestrian traffic, traction control measures should be constantly monitored for their effectiveness. The surface needs to be clean, as dry as possible, and free from hazards protruding into aisles. Control with the use of moisture-absorbent mats or anti-skid adhesive tape. Be sure the mats have backing material that will not slide on the floor. Do not forget; use signage where necessary to display a “Wet Floor” sign indicating the presence of a hazard.

Tell everyone, it is their responsibility to clean up spills immediately or post the spill area and find someone to clean up the spill immediately. Part of “Standard Operating Practices” should include a procedure for taking the appropriate action when someone causes or comes across a slip hazard created by spilled foods, drinks, chemicals or accumulated moisture. Remember to use proper area rugs or mats for food preparation areas or egress points.

Injuries can result from obstacles such as clutter, materials, and equipment in aisles and corridors or at entranceways and in stairwells. Keep all work areas, passageways, storerooms, and service areas clean and orderly. Also, avoid stringing extension cords, cables, or air hoses across working surfaces or in any designated aisle. In office areas, avoid leaving boxes, files, or briefcases in the aisles and encourage safe work practices such as closing file cabinet drawers after each use and clean-up work surfaces where loose items can create slip, trip, or fall hazards. To be truly effective, conduct periodic inspections for slip and trip hazards.

Improper lighting in the workplace is typically associated with about 2% of accidents related to slips, trips and falls. The use of proper illumination in walkways, staircases, ramps, hallways, basements, construction areas, and dock areas will eliminate hazards. As a rule of thumb, there is probably not enough lighting if it is difficult to see. Simple things like encouraging employees to first turn on the light upon entering a dark room will also make a difference.

Now let’s look a personal protective equipment. You are required to complete a job hazard assessment for each job requiring the use of personal protective equipment. The slickness (coefficients) of the soles and the type of heels worn needs to be evaluated to avoid slips, trips, and falls. Shoelaces need to be tied correctly and if a fall-related injury is investigated, the footwear must be part of the evaluation of the incident. Bottom line, we need to empower employees to be responsible for their work environment. Individual behaviors can account for over 50% of slip, trips, and fall injuries, but behavior is the toughest element to control.

You must assign responsibilities to a specific person or group to clean up, with the expectation that it is everyone’s personal responsibility for cleaning up after himself/herself as the preferred means of proper housekeeping. Remember, to have an effective housekeeping program, establish housekeeping procedures as a part of the daily routine.