

Winter Slip and Fall Prevention Program

Slip, trip and fall incidents are the leading cause of accidental injury in the workplace. According to EMC loss analysis, the average cost of a medically treated slip and fall injury exceeds \$13,000, and nearly half of these incidents occur between December and March. Managing walking surface safety is a year-round effort, but special attention is required when snow and ice are present.

It may not be feasible to provide a clean, dry walking surface 100 percent of the time during the winter season, but a comprehensive winter slip and fall prevention program can greatly reduce the risks. Depending on the size of your organization, the responsibility for implementing the program may be centralized, but each site should identify the person(s) responsible for executing the plan for their location. For leased buildings, review the terms of your lease agreement and contact the property manager to discuss snow and ice management responsibilities.

Preplanning

Planning should begin well before the first snowfall and address the following issues:

- **Snow and ice management contracts:** Define depth and weather triggers, timing of service, specific areas covered, where snow will be piled (if not removed) to avoid thaw/refreeze hazards, use of ice control products and who is responsible for thaw/refreeze follow up.
- **Drainage:** Keep storm drains free and flowing to prevent ponding. Divert gutters that empty onto walkways. Repair or regrade low spots along walking surfaces that collect water.
- **Snow and ice management supplies and equipment:** Service snow blowers and snowplows so they are ready when needed. Consider a power brush for snow removal; they typically leave a cleaner (and safer) walking surface.

During a Winter Weather Event

- Remember that the most effective snow/ice removal strategy is to start with mechanical removal followed by ice melt and abrasives as



necessary. Applying liquid brine before the storm hits can help prevent ice and snow from bonding to the pavement, allowing for easier removal.

- Make every effort to clear walkways and parking lots before employees and visitors/customers arrive. Wear slip-resistant footwear and use ice cleats, if conditions warrant.
- Use extra walk-off mats at entrances. Monitor for puddles beyond the mats and mop up immediately. Replace saturated mats or dry them in place with a wet vacuum or extractor.
- Place wet floor warning signs when conditions warrant. Consider predominant foot traffic patterns and position signs so they are highly visible but not potential trip hazards.
- Monitor all walkways throughout the day, both indoors and outside, as walkway conditions can change rapidly. Remove snow accumulation from walkways and apply ice control products and/or traction aids as necessary. Pay particular attention to transition times, such as lunch and the end of the workday.

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Thaw/Refreeze

Even if temperatures are below freezing, sunlight and escaping building heat can melt snow and create ice patches. Pavement temperatures typically lag well below air temperatures during late winter and early spring, creating the possibility of overnight ice formation. Thaw/Refreeze conditions demand special attention. Some tips include:

- Remove or relocate the source of any snowmelt affecting walkways. Pile snow on lower grades where possible and divert downspouts away from walkways.
- Monitor pavement temperatures and audit walkways along high foot-traffic areas. Apply abrasives and ice melt as needed.
- Provide winter walking weather advisories to employees when thaw/refreeze conditions exist, especially when air temperatures are above freezing and ice is unexpected.
- Place safety cones or signs at the most treacherous spots.

Employee Training and Awareness

Every employee plays a significant role in preventing slips and falls. Encourage employees to report any slip and fall hazards they observe to their supervisor or maintenance staff (try EMC's Walkway Check mobile app). Provide winter slip and fall awareness training, post slip and fall awareness posters and send timely email tips. Common sense winter walking tips include:

- Wear shoes or boots that provide traction on snow and ice, such as rubber soles with wide, deep cleats. Avoid plastic and leather soles.
- Wear strap-on ice cleats if conditions warrant, but remove them before walking indoors.
- Enter and exit vehicles carefully. Keep hands free and use the vehicle for support.
- Walk in designated walkways. Do not take shortcuts through snow-covered areas.

- Constantly look for hazards when walking.
- Avoid icy patches by walking around them, even if you must walk to the side of the walkway.
- Walk flat footed with a shortened stride, head up and shoulders back when on slick surfaces.
- Keep hands free and out of pockets to help with balance if needed.
- Avoid carrying heavy or bulky objects on slick surfaces.
- Kick snow and ice off boots and shoes before entering buildings, and wipe shoes thoroughly on mats.

For Additional Information

EMC Insurance Companies: www.emcins.com

- Safety by Topic – Slips and Falls
- Mobile Apps – Walkway Check