



Safety Scene

Winter Walking: Preventing Slips and Falls

by Molly E. Butz

Conscientious winter walkway maintenance is the best way to avoid these accidents.

Beyond the decorations, festivals and gift-giving, winter also brings with it, for many folks, wet and icy conditions. In the September/October issue of *SBC Magazine*, **Safety Scene** covered winter driving. Unfortunately, driving conditions aren't the only dangers associated with slippery winter surfaces. Just getting around on foot can present plenty of hazards when mud, snow and ice are present. However, the potential for slips and falls can be greatly reduced or eliminated when you make a commitment to proper winter walkway maintenance.

Workplace injuries caused by winter slips and falls can be expensive and, in some cases, fatal. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, slip and fall injuries are the third largest cause of workplace injuries with the average claim costing roughly \$28,000. And, even minor injuries might require one or more days away from work, which could easily interfere with your production schedule.



Preparing Sidewalks, Parking Lots & Curbs

When the weather is fair, it's easy to forget about the perils associated with sleet, ice and snow. However, taking a little time when it's warm and dry to fill holes, patch cracks and remove tree roots that jut out into your walkways and working spaces can lessen the obstacles your employees will need to navigate. In addition, installing canopies over entrances exposed to weather can help reduce the amount of snow and water your employees track into the building.

Help eliminate employee and visitor slips and falls by setting a standard for the condition of your outdoor sidewalks, parking lots, curbs and work spaces.

If you'll be contracting with an outside company to take care of snow and ice removal, be sure you know and understand their various policies regarding when and how often they will come. And whether you're contracting or otherwise, it's always a good idea to have a few key cold weather tools on hand, just in case. Shovels are the most obvious, but you'll also need a good de-icing agent, sand (for traction) and wet floor signs. (It's helpful to keep a spare pair of gloves with the snow equipment, then anyone can quickly pitch-in and help!)

Let it Snow!

Once the winter precipitation cycle begins, help eliminate employee and visitor slips and falls by setting a standard for the condition of your outdoor sidewalks, parking lots, curbs and work spaces. Monitor the weather and when it starts to get bad,

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check all of your surface areas on a regular basis. Whenever possible, remove snow and ice from sidewalks and parking areas before people begin arriving at your facility and use salt or sand to keep these areas clear.

To keep indoor surfaces safe, you can use floor mats at entrances (and other hazardous places) to soak up moisture from shoes. It's also helpful to create and mark a designated place just inside the door for people to store their wet umbrellas, boots and outerwear. If wet floors are inevitable, warn pedestrians about slick spots with wet floor signs.

There are also a number of personal safety precautions you and your employees can take when negotiating slick surfaces. Begin by encouraging everyone that comes to your plant to walk in designated walkways whenever possible. Most of them should be obvious, but if necessary, use weather-proof signs to send people in the right directions. In addition, a quick lunchtime presentation on slips and falls can help get everyone on the same page. Here's a Winter Walking Checklist you can use for a safety meeting or post as a reminder in your building:

- Take your time!
- Wear appropriate winter shoes.
- Generally, take smaller steps and shuffle your feet when it's icy.

- Keep both hands free for balance if you can.
- Use handrails where they are available.
- Look at where you're going and keep an eye out for tripping hazards.
- Avoid carrying heavy items or loads so large you cannot see around them.
- Step carefully off of all equipment and vehicles. (Jumping off can lead to a fall.)
- Test potentially slippery areas with one foot before stepping onto them.
- Report slip/fall hazards to your supervisor.
- If you begin to fall:
 - Relax as much as possible.
 - Roll with the fall.
 - If you're carrying something, toss it. Saving yourself and preventing injury is more important.

When the weather outside is frightful, it's the simple things that can help you reduce or eliminate slips and falls. Safety first! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@sbccindustry.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at www.wtcatko.com.

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at a glance

- ❑ The third largest cause of workplace injuries, slip and fall injuries can be expensive to employers.
- ❑ Tend to outdoor and indoor housekeeping during the winter weather months to minimize slip and fall hazards.

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