

AT THE END OF THE WORKDAY, EVERYONE GOES HOME SAFE.

Preventing Slips, Trips, & Falls in Winter

Toolbox Talk



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Slips, trips, and falls are among the leaders in injury-causing accidents in the construction industry. These hazards become an even larger challenge for construction workers during the winter months. To minimize the risk of slips, trips, and falls, there are several precautions that should be taken: improve the work environment, adjust your behavior, and wear appropriate footwear.

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In winter, all walking surfaces should be cleared of snow and ice as quickly as possible, and deicer spread on potentially slippery surfaces. Having main travel paths kept clear of ice or from being snow-packed is essential to minimizing risk.

Be aware of your own behavior around slippery conditions, and modify it if necessary: anytime you exit a building or vehicle, you need to be aware of the environment and begin preventing slips immediately. Most accidents happen when people take that first step onto the slick surface. By taking shorter steps and walking at a slower pace in these conditions, you are al-

ready minimizing the risk of an accident or injury. And keep in mind that while snow and ice are the obvious culprits in winter, frost should not be overlooked as a slip hazard: while it typically does not stick around long in the early morning, be sure to use caution while walking in frost and avoid slipping.

Proper footwear in the winter is critical. Walking on snow or ice is often unavoidable, but having a pair of safety-toed boots may not be enough. There are three keys to a good pair of work shoes: falling object protection, temperature regulation, and traction. A pair of safety-toed boots that is insulated or paired with wool socks, has a sturdy sole, and excellent traction can prevent slips, trips, or falls in the winter. This simple piece of personal protective gear should not be underestimated.

Incident Profile:

To help illustrate the importance of being prepared when first stepping onto a slick surface, consider this 61-year-old carpenter’s accident.

On a mid-February morning, the carpenter arrived at his jobsite for the day. As he stepped from his pickup, his left-foot stepped onto an ice patch. His foot slipped, he lost his balance, and fell backward. During the fall, his head struck the door panel of his pickup, splitting his head open. He unfortunately passed away before the EMS could get him to the hospital.

Sadly, incidents like this are not uncommon. In a Bureau of Labor Statistics study, it was found that there were 20,520 workplace slip-and-fall injuries that resulted in at least one day away from work for recovery. The majority of these can be prevented by following the recommendations above: improve walkways, adjust your behavior in slick conditions, and wear good winter shoes.

Talking Points:

1. Do you have good shoes for wintertime work?
2. Where are our hazard spots for icy surfaces?
3. What are the precautions we need to take for winter?
4. What caused the man in the incident report to slip and Fall?

