

Slips, trips and falls.

Slips, trips and falls are the leading types of work-related injuries on school campuses. Each year these types of claims account for hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical and wage replacement cost. The claim cost has a negative impact on an operating budget and the ability to deliver value-added educational services. Slips, trips and falls (STFs) include slip/fall on the same level, falls on stairs, trips over surface elevations/changes, falls in holes, slips on water or other contaminants, trips/falls in parking lots and ladder falls. To prevent these claims, changes are needed to protect staff, students and visitors. Everyone plays an integral part in minimizing these claim events.



Observation

Identifying STF exposures on campus is important before an accident or injury event occurs. Intervention can be made with either interim or permanent changes to the hazard to prevent these types of claims. This can be done by using self-monitoring observations of work and common areas, then reporting such findings to be resolved.

In order to make this an effective prevention tool, it is recommended that a frame of reference (a standard) of what determines a hazard or exposure be developed. Secondly, there should be a formal reporting system to report findings to the proper party for correction. The formal reporting system starts with who does a person report the exposure to and how.

Investigations

Slips, trips and falls are considered a type of claim. Oftentimes when the injury report is made, the description of injury determines the type of claim that the claims adjuster will note in their report. However, there is also a need to create prevention solutions or processes which are built from determining the contributory causes of the accident or event. Each accident has one or more contributory causes that lead to the injury. Therefore, it is critical that good effective accident investigation be conducted on these types of claims to determine both primary and secondary causes.

Schools can create a means to investigate these STF contributory causes by using an incident investigation tool that answers the following questions: who, where, what, when, and how did the accident occur? In addition, there are special incident investigation forms that can be used to investigate slip and fall, ramp fall and stair fall types of claims. For those schools who are interested in implementing special investigation methods, contact a Gallagher Loss Control expert for further assistance.

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Solutions – Intervention strategies

Once the school begins to identify the contributory causes of these types of claims, solutions can be integrated into the work environment to prevent or minimize these accidents. Once risk exposures are identified, the school can use the Hierarchical Controls to determine the solution that can address these risks.

American National Standard Institute (ANSI) Z10, Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems, identifies this Hierarchy of Controls as: Elimination, Substitution, Engineering Controls, Administrative Controls, Warnings, and Personal Protective Equipment.



Slip, trip and fall prevention begins with the prevention model above.

- **Elimination** is the total elimination of a hazard. For example totally eliminating a sidewalk area that is uprooted by a tree.
- **Substitution** is the replacement of the hazard by a lesser degree of risk exposure. For example, replacing a work area that has to be accessed at an elevation by moving the need to climb to the elevation to a lower level.
- **Engineering controls** is the addressing of the hazard by applying engineering methods. For example, selection of a good mat system to remove both debris and water from the shoes before entering a common hallway.
- **Administrative controls** are “soft controls” put in place to address a hazard. For example, scheduling work that does not interfere with the walkway you are to remove.
- **Warnings** are the use of visual messages of caution such as painting a curb yellow or stair nose yellow to demarcate the changes in surface elevations.
- **Personal protective equipment** is providing employees with special equipment to address the hazard. For example, footwear with soles that are designed with special sole patterns and materials for better gripping in wet locations.



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Education and training

Human action is a major element in STF type accidents. Consequently, training and education plays a critical role in the prevention of injuries. Understanding the causes of many slip, trip and fall injuries can help the avoidance of such hazards. Human factors such as a person's gait pattern and work activities (pushing, pulling, carrying, running, distraction, etc.) and how they can impact the potential for a STF should be communicated. Explanation of the role that missteps on stairs, using the ladders incorrectly, going through water on floor areas, seeing a spill on the floor and ignoring it all have a major contributing factors or elimination of a fall. Therefore, education and training is a key component in preventing slips, trips and falls.

You should create a forum to review and discuss STF events with the staff. These lessons learned are one method to create awareness concerning STF. Constant awareness campaigns to get the message out on slip, trip and fall prevention are beneficial. Education and training throughout the year can be beneficial in creating an awareness campaign.

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18GGB33562A