



## WISCONSIN SCHOOL TALK

A Safety and Health Bulletin for K-12 Schools  
From Gallagher National Risk Control

K-12 Education  
December 2023

### Exposures to Falls Due to Ice and Snow

#### What are they?

Falls due to ice and snow describe winter weather fall exposures that typically occur in parking lots and on sidewalks. There are other similar fall exposures, like from spills or tracked-in water, but we will focus here on outdoor falls only.

#### What is their impact?

Ice- and snow-related falls could result in a wide range of injuries, from sprains and bruises to closed head injuries. Here, slips are most prevalent and will typically result in musculoskeletal injuries to the wrists, head, neck, back, or buttocks. Winter weather and early darkness may compound risks to sufferers of serious injuries in parking lots who may be unable to get up and self-rescue unless help is near.

#### Why do they happen?

Full exposure to the elements makes a parking lot one of a school's more hazardous places. An ice- or snow-related fall is typically the result of an individual's at-risk behavior while walking. That is, for whatever reason, an employee is either not focusing on where they are walking, are unable to see their pathway, or are taking shortcuts over, or through unsafe conditions, like:

- Patches of ice or black ice
- Unplowed or unshoveled walks
- Landscape or lawn areas
- Poor visibility
- Freezing rain and standing water

Examples of at-risk behaviors that lead to falls on ice and snow include:

- Shortcuts over or through hazardous conditions, like landscaping, ice, or water
- Walking backward
- Not focusing on the environment
- Hurrying or running
- Carrying an object that obstructs the view of the pathway
- Being distracted and not paying attention to surroundings
- Wearing improper footwear for the conditions
- Carrying too much, making balancing difficult

#### Do they happen?

Absolutely. In fact, falls that occur on ice and snow are a very common source of slip, trip, and fall injuries in quantity (frequency) and in degree of injury (severity).

## What can we do about them?

There are several simple things you can do right now to minimize your exposure to falls from ice and snow conditions.

- Always focus on where you step. Winter conditions in parking lots can change rapidly. Watch where you are stepping to allow you to observe hazardous conditions.
- Review snow/ice removal contracts with subcontractors and make sure they are being followed.
- Provide plastic sandwich bags filled with salt/sand at entryways that can be used to reduce slips, trips, and falls.
- Consider installing icy weather signage at exits and entrances. Signs that contain a small mechanism that changes color from silver to blue when temperatures drop below 37 degrees are on the market.
- Do not carry items that block your view of the pathway. Take additional trips if needed or move your vehicle closer to the doorway to minimize additional trips.
- If possible, park near a light source in the early morning or night time hours to help you better see unsafe conditions.
- Manage your time to avoid running or hurrying.
- Walk on the pavement. Avoid shortcuts over lawn or landscaping that can become slippery or a tripping hazard.
- Avoid other simultaneous activities like reading/texting/phone calls while walking.
- Wear appropriate footwear. We recommend a low-heeled, rubber-soled shoe for traction in all conditions.
- Choose a safe path. Take the time to step around an unsafe condition, like ice, instead of through it.
- Help others. If you see a hazard that you can fix, fix it. Otherwise, report observed unsafe conditions for correction.
- Communicate. If you observe someone placing themselves at risk of a parking lot fall, let them know.



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