

Preventing Slips/Falls in Winter

Depending on where you live, California winters can be wet, icy, or both. Use these tips to prevent slipping during the wettest and coldest period of the year.

THE SCIENCE OF SLIPPING

Newton's Laws of Motion describes the science of why slips occur. Without it getting too complicated, slips happen when there is inadequate traction between your shoe and the surface you are walking on. All safe work practices are designed to tip the science in your favor to prevent a slip and fall.

Dirt, leaves, trash, water, grease, and yes, ice can reduce traction making us more likely to lose our balance.

SURFACES

Pay attention to what type of flooring you are walking on. If not treated with a special finish, smooth floors such as marble, terrazzo, wood, and concrete are more prone to slips and falls, *especially when wet*.

Street and parking lot curbs painted yellow or red to increase visibility also significantly decrease traction during rain and snowy conditions. Exercise caution.

FOOTWEAR

The condition of your footwear will increase or decrease your risk of slipping. Check your tread to ensure you have adequate depth. Whenever possible wear slip/resistant footwear.



WALK LIKE A PENGUIN

The gait and body mechanics of how we walk are other factors influencing the likelihood of slipping on wet or icy surfaces. A certain set of flightless birds have perfected how to walk on slippery surfaces. It goes without saying that you should avoid walking on slippery surfaces but that is not always feasible. When there is no other choice, walk like penguin.

- Keeps your knees somewhat bent in a slightly wider than shoulder width stance
- Slightly extend your arms away from your body to help with balance
- Point your feet out slightly
- Take short steps and shuffle your feet slowly, sort of like you're waddling

Using this technique will keep your center of gravity over your feet increasing traction with the floor. If you do slip using this technique you will have less momentum than you normally would decreasing your risk of a serious injury.

FLOOR MATS

By strategically placing and maintaining floor mats, you can significantly reduce the amount of water, mud, and debris brought into your building during winter weather.

Place a large outdoor scraper mat just outside the entrance to the building. This mat should be designed to scrape off large debris, snow, or mud from shoes. Inside the entrance, use an absorbent mat to capture additional moisture from shoes. Select mats that are designed to soak up water to prevent it from being tracked farther into the building. Add additional absorbent mats as necessary for maximum effectiveness.



PRO TIPS

- Use handrails when walking on stairs
- Wear snow cleats over shoes on icy walkways
- Ensure pathways are well-lit
- Wipe your feet on a mat(s) when entering a building
- Keep your hands free when walking
- Use wet floor signs
- Report damaged mats or any other unsafe conditions to your supervisor ASAP



HOW TO FALL SAFELY

Did you know the [AARP](#) teaches senior citizens how to fall safely? While we do not want you slipping and falling, these tips can help minimize a serious injury if the worst happens:

STAY LOOSE - It's easier said than done, but do not tense up and make your body rigid. Protect your head and spine. Tuck your chin to your chest if falling backward and turn your face to the side if falling forward.

FALL SIDEWAYS - if possible, and land on the softer fleshy places like your butt, thighs, and the side of your body. Large soft tissues can absorb the impact better than bone, lessening the risk of wrists and arm fractures that sometimes happens when people use their hands to absorb the impact of a fall.

LEAN INTO THE FALL to help give you some control and aim for the most suitable landing such as grass and avoid anything that could puncture your body.