

# A LESSON IN SAFETY

## PREVENT SLIPS & FALLS

It's Monday morning. You line your first graders up to walk to music class. As you lead the chatty students down the stairwell, you turn to ask them to lower their voices. Suddenly, you tumble down the stairs. After a trip to the urgent care, you come back to school with a sprained wrist. Although this fall is serious, it could have been worse, resulting in a critical head, back or neck injury.

Unfortunately, this scenario is not unusual. In fact, slips and falls are the number one cause of school workplace accidents and the leading reason of general liability claims.

### Preventing the Top Causes of Slips & Falls

**Stairs** – The simple act of using the stairs can lead to slips and falls. Take the following steps to prevent stairwell related injuries.

- Use handrails when ascending and descending stairs.
- Slow down when you are using the stairs.
- Do not carry large loads on stairs. Carry less and take multiple trips.
- Keep stairways free of objects. Objects close to or on stairwells are hazardous and can cause falls.
- Wear proper footwear.
- Install proper lighting.



**Ladders** – The use of a ladder or step stool, rather than a desk or a chair, is the first choice when you need to reach or set an item in a high place. However, ladders can be hazardous if not used correctly. Take the following steps to prevent ladder related injuries.

- Ensure the ladder has no defects and is stable.
- Have someone hold the ladder steady. If you are alone, ensure the ladder or stool has level footing.
- Ensure the ladder can hold the weight of the user.
- Ensure the ladder is the correct height for the specific task.
- Never stand on the top rung of a ladder.
- Avoid positioning the ladder in a heavy-traffic area where someone could bump into it.

**Improper Footwear** – High heels look great for a night out on the town, but they might not work well in a school setting. At the same time, worn-down and risky footwear account for 25% of all slip and fall accidents. Take the following steps to prevent improper footwear related injuries.

- Encourage staff to wear proper footwear for the day's tasks and weather conditions.
- Encourage shoes with flat heels, multichannel tread, and rubber soles.
- Avoid raised heels or shoes with leather soles, worn heels or open backs.

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**Wet Surfaces** – The first 15-20 feet inside the entrance of a building can be unsafe due to excess water being tracked inside. Take the following steps to prevent wet surface related injuries.

- Place scraper mats on the outside entrance of buildings.
- Place water-absorbent mats on the inside entrance of buildings.
- Ensure mats are hazard free. Replace cracked, displaced, or damaged ones.
- Cleanup any puddles of water at once or place a caution sign in the hazardous area before cleanup.
- Remove the caution sign once the area is dry. Signs left up for too long tend to be ignored.

**Outdoor Surfaces** – Sidewalks and parking lots are ripe for slips and falls. Changes in sidewalk elevation as small as ¼-inch can cause a person to trip and parking lot defects are an added danger. Take the following steps to prevent outdoor surface related injuries.

- Inspect parking lots and sidewalks for cracks, potholes, and other damage. Repair these areas as soon as possible.
- Use cones or caution tape to block a hazardous area.

**Snow and Ice** – Outdoor slips and falls are most prevalent in late winter when warmer daytime temperatures melt snow, but colder evening temperatures refreeze it. These slippery conditions can be disastrous, but avoidable. Take the following steps to prevent snow and ice related injuries.

- Implement a snow removal plan. Decide when and how often snow should be removed. (One-inch accumulation is recommended)
- Designate an area to pile snow away from walking routes.
- Clear parking lots and sidewalks before staff, students and pedestrians arrive.
- Mark icy areas with cones.
- Apply ice melt or traction aids, such as sand or poultry grit to slippery areas.
- Encourage all employees to report icy or slippery spots.



### For More Information to Prevent Slip and Fall Accidents in Schools

Montana State Fund's safety focused website [safemt.com](http://safemt.com) is filled with videos and resources to help keep your employees safe and mitigate slips and falls at your school.