

# Preventing Slips, Trips, & Falls – The 4 Fs

Historically, injuries resulting from slips, trips & falls have been the top cause of employee injuries at PCC. These injuries range from minor abrasions and contusions to serious sprains and strains as well as fractures. The response to these types of injuries ranges from the application of first aid to treatment in an emergency room with days away from work. Most slip, trip & fall injuries are preventable.

Slips are caused by a loss in traction between one's feet or footwear and the surface on which one stands or walks. Slips can be caused by objects or liquids on the walking surface, e.g., marbles, banana peels, ice, water, mud, cord, loose flooring, etc. The loss of traction combined with one's momentum while walking can lead to a fall, either to the walking surface itself, or worse to a lower level.

Trips are caused by objects that are contacted while one is walking. Such objects impact our stride and when combined with our momentum result in a stumble and possibly a fall. Common trip hazards include uneven surfaces, stairs, surface transitions, cords, clutter, furniture and other objects.

The best and most effective way to combat slip, trip & fall hazards is to spot them and eliminate them. This can be accomplished by correcting an unsafe condition oneself or by using the [ReADY System](#) to contact Facilities Management Services to address larger, more complex conditions.

Slip, trip & fall hazards may not always get reported or corrected so it's important to know the four factors that can contribute to slip, trip & fall injuries. These are one's level of fitness, one's ability to focus on the path of travel, the footwear one is wearing, and finally weather and/or illumination levels that we'll refer to as phenomena. Being knowledgeable of these four factors won't guarantee that one will avoid a slip, trip or fall injury, but can help one navigate across any walking surface with a greater degree of confidence and awareness of potential hazards.

**Fitness** – One does not have to be in peak physical form to prevent a slip, trip & fall injury. Simply knowing one's individual abilities and fitness to perform a given task can go a long way in preventing injuries. The following conditions should be considered before navigating across a walking surface:

- Level of alertness/energy /time of day
- Physical condition (balance/equilibrium, joint pain, mobility issues)
- Work restrictions/limitations
- Age
- Medications
- Unacclimatized to heat

**Suggestions:** Get enough sleep, use caffeine wisely; consult healthcare practitioner regarding physical well-being, abilities and limitations; know the effects and side effects of medications (both prescription and over-the-counter); Visit a Fitness Center or join a gym for regular exercise; Incorporate walking into daily routine; Eat healthy foods and supplement diet where necessary; Become acclimated to heat slowly over time; Stop smoking.

**Focus** – When walking across any surface, one’s focus should be on scanning one’s pathway for any visual hazards. Often, our ability to scan our pathway is compromised by distractions that focus our attention elsewhere, e.g., phone screen, scenery, items we’re carrying, issues affecting us emotionally, etc. When we’re distracted, we often don’t recognize surface transitions, objects in our path, hazards associated with rooms entered, etc. Exercise a heightened level of awareness when any of the following conditions apply:

- Distractions preventing one from scanning immediate path of travel: (phone, texts, scenery, conversations, traffic)
- Depression, family crises
- Workload, impending deadlines
- Inability to see immediate path of travel (carrying boxes)
- Failure to predict hazards based on environment (restroom, locker room, kitchen)
- Failure to utilize handrails when using stairs
- Failure to recognize transitions (asphalt-concrete, wood or tile-carpet, hardscape-softscape)
- Failure to recognize obstacles in path of travel
- Failure to recognize steep slopes

**Suggestions:** Scan path of travel every 5-10 seconds looking for slip and trip hazards; Utilize EAP resources, seek counseling; Pace your work; Use handrails when ascending/descending stairs; Use material handling devices for larger/awkward loads; Understand surface transitions have corresponding changes in how they interact with footwear (friction); Avoid traveling on sloped unimproved surfaces like grassy hills; Look for wet floor signs or shiny floors indicating a level of moisture present.

**Footwear** – Our choice of footwear and the condition of our footwear can affect our ability to maintain traction with a walking surface. This is especially true during periods of, or after, inclement weather. Consider the following factors about footwear:

- Appropriate for surface
- Appropriate for conditions (weather, foreign substance)
- Adequate tread
- Proper fit & wear
- Supplement with appropriate PPE if issued

**Suggestions:** Choose appropriate footwear for known/predicted conditions in work environment; Have 2<sup>nd</sup> pair of shoes for inclement weather or before/after work; Replace or resole worn shoes; Ensure shoes fit properly and are worn as intended; If issued traction devices, keep them in your vehicle where they can be donned as needed to traverse icy parking lots, roads, etc.

**Phenomena** – Factors associated with inclement weather or ambient light levels can affect walking surfaces, increasing the likelihood of slip, trip & fall injuries. Be on the lookout for the following conditions and adapt to predictable or unforeseen conditions as conditions warrant:

- Active precipitation: snow, sleet, hail, ice, rain
- High winds (downed limbs, excessive leaf litter)
- Icy surfaces
- Increased glare at certain times of year
- Hazards obfuscated by shadows or darkness
- Failure to modify path of travel
- Failure to modify gait when warranted

**Suggestions:** Work from home if able; Be aware of adverse changes to walking surfaces including stairs; Recognize obstacles may be buried under snow; Paths of travel may be limited – Be prepared for a longer walk to/from your work location; Travel on shoveled and salted surfaces; Glare and darkness may impede your ability to detect and avoid hazards – follow well-lit paths or carry a flashlight; Modify gait when slippery surfaces are encountered – do the penguin shuffle across icy surfaces.

By participating in this and other National Safety Month activities, the PCC community is taking meaningful steps toward building a stronger safety culture — and potentially preventing injuries before they happen.