

SAFETY NEWSLETTER

SELF INSURED WORKER'S COMPENSATION FUND MEMBERS

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Safe Work and Home Habits, Creating a Safety Culture in 2019

Tips for Avoiding Slips and Falls

Falls are the leading cause of injury in the workplace. Keep these tips in mind to avoid an injury:

- As you walk, keep an eye on the floor in front of you for spills.
- If you see a spill, never just walk by it. Always clean it up or call someone to clean it up.
- Wear nonskid shoes when you work in kitchens, outdoors, or any other place where you will commonly be walking on slippery surfaces.
- Never climb on shelving units or storage units to get things. Use only approved ladders.
- Never lean on railings, even if they look solid. They could be improperly secured, and you could fall.
- Always use safety harnesses when working at heights.

Stay Slip-Free

According to the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI), "slips and falls are the leading cause of workers' compensation claims" and "represent the primary cause of lost days from work." Some falls result from slipping on wet floor areas, a problem that can be avoided by following a few basic tips. Key rules to reduce the possibility of injury related to slipping and falling in wet areas include:

- Keep floors dry - Immediately take steps to dry water or other liquids that may gather on floor areas due to weather, spills, leaks, or other causes.
- Properly mark wet floors - In situations where it's not possible to dry wet floors immediately, clearly mark with appropriate signage.
- Avoid wet floors - Do not walk on flooring areas that are not dry.

Keep Walkways Clear

Fall injuries are not always caused by slipping on a wet surface.

Trip hazards resulting from clutter in walkways or poor positioning of furniture and equipment in inappropriate areas are responsible for many workplace falls and other injuries, such as broken toes, sprained ankles, etc.

Eliminate clutter - Keep walkways and stairs tidy and clear. Make sure they stay free from clutter and other trip hazards, such as power cords, file boxes, etc.

Keep drawers closed - Keep desk and filing cabinets drawers closed at all times they are not being used.

Careful furniture & equipment positioning - Situate furniture, office equipment and other workplace items to avoid interrupting the natural flow of traffic in the workplace.

Pick things up - If you see items in the floor that pose a risk, pick them up and move them - even if you are not the person who placed them there.

Don't Stand or Climb on Furniture

As Safety + Health magazine points out, "Standing on chairs - particularly rolling office chairs - is a significant fall hazard." It's not uncommon for workers to fall and hurt themselves as result of standing or climbing on chairs, desks, file cabinets and other common office furniture. Protect yourself against these easily avoidable accidents by:

- Use furniture for intended purposes only - Chairs, desks and other workplace furnishings aren't meant to function as ladders. Using them in this way can be a quick path to a serious injury.
- Use proper equipment - When you need to reach something overhead, properly use a step ladder or stool designed for climbing to access the item(s).

Tips for Lifting Properly

You may work with patients who need help getting around or at a factory where you're lifting boxes on a continual basis. No matter who or what you may be lifting, there are some key points to consider:

- If you are approaching a box and don't know what's in it, try moving it a little with your foot first to see how easily it moves. This will help you gauge how heavy the box is.
- Always wear nonskid shoes when you are lifting often or lifting potentially heavy objects.
- Never bend at the waist and lift the box up with your back.
- Keep your upper body straight and parallel with your lower legs. Grab the item and push up with your legs, not with your back.
- Never jerk your body around when lifting. You may feel fine after doing this once, but repeated occurrences can easily lead to injury in even the healthiest workers.

Take Steps to Prevent RSI

According to The Standard's Workplace Possibilities website, individuals who frequently perform similar tasks at work are at risk of developing **repetitive stress injuries** (RSI) such as tendinitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and more. This is just as true for people who work in production-related jobs as it is for those who use computers or other office equipment in their work. Key tips to protect yourself against RSIs include:

Stretch and move - Periodically take brief breaks to stretch and move around as a way to relieve your joints and muscles from staying in the same position for too long

Mitigate ergonomic risk factors - Recognize risk factors in your work environment related to ergonomic safety and take steps to reduce the potential for related injuries.

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Use Proper Posture

According to Spine-health.com, Back pain is one of the most common work-related injuries. Proper posture can be critical to preventing work-related back pain and injuries. Whether you spend most of your work time sitting, standing, walking, bending, or in any other position, proper posture is essential.

Proper positioning - Follow best practice recommendations for good posture in various positions, such as those recommended by Mayo Clinic and Cleveland Clinic.

Posture exercises - Set aside a few minutes to do posture exercises a few times each week to improve your body positioning and protect your spine against injury.

Fire Safety Tips

Some jobs carry an increased risk of fire, but understanding fire safety is important for any occupation. Keep these tips in mind:

- Have a fire plan in place for your work-site, and make sure your employees understand it fully. Having a fire drill every now and then is a good way for employees to keep escape routes, meeting spots, and procedures in mind.
- Avoid the use of so-called "power strips" whenever possible. They are often prone to overuse and can start a fire if too many appliances are plugged into them.
- Keep cleaning chemicals and other work chemicals in a well-ventilated room. Many chemicals emit vapors that are highly flammable and which can be set off with something as small as a spark from a faulty wire.
- Know where all the fire extinguishers are throughout your work-site and know how to use them.
- Remember that grease fires cannot be fought by dousing them with water. Oil is hydrophobic and also is the fuel source in grease fires. Water will simply splash the oil around and spread the fire even further.

Planning for a Safe Workplace

Falls, lifting injuries, and fires are dangerous and common in the workplace, but that's just the beginning. There are many possible safety issues that can occur at your office or factory. Sometimes the best workplace safety arises out of simple good planning and smart thinking.

Every single workplace should have a safety committee and safety plan in place. If you don't have safety committees at your workplace, then propose one. If you work at home, you are the safety committee. Working at home or for a very small business isn't a reason to get out of safety planning.

If you don't have a safety plan in place yet, follow these steps when you recognize a workplace safety issue:

- Make sure that everyone else in your workplace is aware of the problem.
- Notify your supervisor or manager.
- File any reports or documents about the problem.
- Follow up. Telling someone there's a problem is not a guarantee that the problem will be resolved satisfactorily. Report it and later follow up to make sure the problem was addressed.



Keep Your Hands Clean

No matter what type of environment you work in, keeping your hands clean is critical to workplace health and safety. As the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) points out, proper hand hygiene is critical "to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others."

The CDC indicates that key times to wash your hands in the workplace include:

- Food - Before eating; before, during, and after food preparation
- Injury - Before and after treating your own or someone else's injury (such as a cut or wound)
- Illness - After coughing, blowing your nose, or sneezing; before or after assisting someone who is ill
- Personal hygiene - After using the toilet
- Contact with waste - After touching or taking out the garbage

Of course, there are other workplace-specific circumstances that apply. For example, those who work in a daycare center should wash their hands after changing a diaper. Those who work around animals should wash their hands after coming into contact with an animal or animal waste.

According to the CDC, the way you wash your hands is just as important as when you do so. You can't just run them under the faucet for a few seconds and shake them. To promote health and safety in the workplace, you need to follow proper hand-washing techniques.

Exercise Caution with Space Heaters

Space heaters represent another fire safety risk in the workplace. While some companies completely ban their use, others choose to allow it to allow for employee comfort based on varying temperature preferences. Travelers Insurance advises employers, "If you do not have a formal policy prohibiting the use of space heaters within your facility, it is important to provide guidelines for safe use." Important guidelines to consider include (but are not limited to):

- Require management approval - Require employees to get approval from management before bringing in a space heater to use in the workplace.
- Publish specific requirements - Require approved units to meet specific guidelines, including being free from damage and rated by Underwriters Laboratory (UL) or similar.
- Proper placement - Make sure that employees keep at least 3 feet of open space surrounding approved heaters, verify they are not being used near combustible or flammable substances, and make sure they are not left unattended.

Report All Accidents and Injuries

Chances are that your company's safety policy specifically states employees who experience an accident or suffer an injury in the course of business should report the occurrence to his or her supervisor or the company's safety officer right away. This is an important safety rule that you should always follow, as it serves to protect you and the company, and can also help prevent someone else from getting hurt.

Follow company policy - Don't talk yourself out of reporting an accident or injury per your company's policy because you think it may be too minor to bother. The company needs to know for a variety of reasons, including Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) compliance.