



Slip, Trip & Fall Accidents In The Workplace

Statistics from the Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) Ontario indicate that each year slip, trip or falls at the workplace result in the deaths of about 20 people. 17,000 employees miss time at work because of their injuries.

20% of all claims in Canada are a result of slip, trip and fall accidents with the average cost of a WSIB claim standing at \$11,771. In Ontario, these claims amount to over two billion dollars a year.

Add to the initial claim the costs of staff replacement, equipment damage and lost productivity, the estimated expenses to your company climb rapidly.

In fact, slip, trip and fall accidents constitute the majority of general industry accidents. They rank second only to motor vehicle accidents in terms of incidences of personal injury.

As an occupier, it is your responsibility to ensure that areas such as aisles, stairs, ramps, walkways, driveways and parking lots are kept clear and reasonably safe for the persons using them. If you fail to maintain standards, you may be held liable in case of accidents.

In cases of shared space where more than one business exists on the premises, the liability may be shared. This may also include a landlord and tenant if you do not own the building. If you rent or lease space, check that the lease agreement specifies the responsibilities of each party, for example, who is responsible for maintenance or repairs? Who will be held liable in case of an accident?

Some hazardous conditions include:

1. Changes in elevation or uneven surfaces (cracks, potholes, ramps, steps, gaps, etc.)
2. Slippery surfaces (wet floors, smooth tiles, marble floor, etc.)
3. Environmental conditions - ice and snow not cleared
4. Unexpected changes in elevation (eg., sudden drops)
5. Debris in walking areas (aisles not clear, untidy areas near equipment, etc)
6. Missing, broken or loose handrails
7. Insufficient or inadequate lighting
8. Stairways not properly maintained (unsecured or no handrail, deterioration, frayed carpeting, obstacles)
9. Improper housekeeping (cluttered areas, obstructions)

Should an accident occur on your business premises:

There are criteria that will determine whether or not the proper standard of preventative care was applied. These may include:

1. Whether adequate precautions were taken for safety within conduct guidelines
2. Whether the danger could have been foreseen
3. How long the risk existed without measures be taken
4. How easily the danger could have been prevented
5. System of inspection

There are precautions that you can take to minimize risks such as:

1. Put a regular inspection and maintenance program into place.
2. Create a form to use during inspections to ensure that nothing is missed.
3. Maintain proper and adequate lighting.
4. Ensure that all staff is trained to identify hazards and emphasize the importance of reporting them.
5. If a hazardous situation occurs, such as spilled liquid on the floor, immediately post warning signs and barriers until the spill has been cleaned up.
6. Maintain all flooring in good condition. About 65% of slips, trips and falls that occur are "same level" falls.
7. Keep documents that record inspections, repairs and state of the premises.

If someone is injured, take the following steps:

1. Find medical treatment, calling an ambulance if necessary.
2. Record the names of any witnesses and obtain a description of the incident.
3. Refer any discussions with the claimant to the insurer. Advise your staff not to discuss liability with the claimant and NEVER TO ADMIT LIABILITY.
4. Your staff should be advised not to accept fault on behalf of the company. They should state that they are not permitted to discuss the incident, but will refer the request for information to an authorized person.
5. Take photos of both the area where the incident happened and if possible, the footwear the claimant was wearing.
6. Report the incident to your insurer with details and information about precautions you had taken to avoid such incidents.