

# SAFETY SENSE

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***Editor's note: PASS ON EACH ISSUE OF THIS NEWSLETTER TO EVERYONE WITH SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES AT YOUR COMPANY.***

## Avoiding slips and trips

### Key Points

- Slips and trips may sound like minor incidents, but they can result in serious injuries; including broken bones, sprains, back injuries, and concussions. Because workers in the landcare industry are often operating sharp tools, such as hedge trimmers and chain saws, while standing on wet, muddy, and/or uneven terrain, slips and trips also can lead to cuts and even amputations.
- Fifteen percent of disabling injuries in the United States each year result from slips, trips, or falls, according to the University of Florida. Data from insurance company CNA shows slips, trips, and falls are the third leading cause of injury in the landscape, lawn care, and plant nursery industry and rank third in terms of workers' compensation costs.
- Most slip and trip accidents can be avoided. These incidents usually happen when workers are in a hurry and thus fail to pay attention to what they're doing and/or take shortcuts (jumping over an obstacle instead of taking the long way around, for example).

### Checklist for employers and supervisors

- ✓ Remember the indirect cost of accidents — even minor ones — are difficult to measure and can be four to 10 times the direct costs. Indirect costs include lost time of a supervisor and surrounding crew, damaged tools, and contract delays.
- ✓ Work with your insurance carrier to determine your company's most common accident types and how much each type costs in claims. Slips and trips are likely to be high on the list. Ask your insurer to help you devise strategies to reduce claims — something it should be willing to do in exchange for the premiums you're already paying.
- ✓ Review slip and trip injuries that have occurred during the past five years. Look for common causes and develop recommendations for corrective actions. If corrective actions were recommended in the past, evaluate whether they were effective in preventing similar incidents.
- ✓ Check job sites or work areas for slip-and-trip hazards before work begins each day and throughout the day.
- ✓ Train employees to identify and address slip-and-trip hazards.
- ✓ Prohibit running and jumping on or off equipment or vehicles.

## Employee dos and don'ts

### Do:

- Check the job site for slip-and-trip hazards before beginning work each day.
- Pay attention to where you're walking. Look out for holes in the ground, sticks, stones, and changes in terrain. Where feasible, use cones or tape to mark these areas.
- Be particularly careful when walking on grass that is wet, either from rain or morning dew.
- Keep in mind, slippery surfaces may not appear dangerous until you step on them.
- Clean up grease, water, and other spills when you notice them, or bring them to the attention of a supervisor. Icy and greasy spots can be covered with sand, dirt, or other absorbent material.
- Wear boots with slip-resistant soles, and keep them free of grease and oil.
- Ensure high-traffic areas of the job site or work area are clear of obstructions.
- Be particularly careful when using stairs. Stairways and individual steps that are too steep or not steep enough can pose trip hazards, so take note of unusual steepness or riser height. Look for worn or broken steps as well. When carrying a load up or down stairs, situate it so it doesn't block your vision and, if possible, keep one hand free to hold onto the railing.
- Turn off tools when carrying them.

### Don't:

- Be in a hurry. Your employer would rather you work safely and slowly than too quickly and risk injury.
- Take shortcuts. These usually contain obstacles, routes not designed for foot traffic, or unstable or slippery surfaces.
- Run, jump, or slide if you must walk across a slippery or wet surface. Rather, take short, slow steps, and keep your toes pointed slightly outward. Keep your hands at your sides and not in your pockets so you can support yourself should you begin to fall.
- Run anywhere on the job, including on stairs. Also, avoid skipping steps.
- Jump on or off equipment or vehicles.
- Leave electrical cords or hoses across walkways or paths.

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