

Slips, Trips, and Falls

Did you know slips, trips, and falls are one of the greatest personal injury hazards facing your members, guests, and employees? In fact, according to the [National Floor Safety Institute](#), falls are the leading cause of emergency room visits. Overall, approximately 50% of injuries reported by Church Mutual policyholders are the result of slips, trips, or falls.

Any slip, trip, or fall incident brings the potential for your organization to be held responsible for that person's injury. To protect people from painful and potentially deadly injuries and to protect your organization from liability and unnecessary claim costs, take action to prevent accidents from occurring in the first place.

Interior

There can be just as many slip and fall hazards inside your building as there are outside and the result can be just as severe. Once people enter your building, help them stay on their own two feet by considering these key areas:

- **Entryways:** Walk-off mats are important for every entrance to help trap rain, snow, dirt, and anything else being tracked in from outside that may lead to a slip and fall. Make sure mats are long enough to allow people to take several steps on them before stepping off, and ensure mats do not become too saturated with moisture. Read [Enter into safety](#) for more information.
- **Stairs:** Church Mutual policyholders experience more fatalities from slips and falls on stairs than anywhere else. Many of these accidents can be prevented by keeping steps clear of debris and obstacles, ensuring steps and landings are well lit, and making sure steps are appropriately constructed and have sturdy handrails. Read our article [Recognizing the importance of slips and falls on steps and stairs](#) to learn more.
- **Kitchen:** Floors can easily become wet or greasy when the kitchen is in use. This in turn leads to an increased risk of slips and falls. Encourage kitchen works to immediately clean up spills and mop floors regularly. Be sure to minimize clutter on the floor and place non-skid floor mats near sinks and other areas likely to become wet and slippery. Consider utilizing our poster [Prevent kitchen accidents and injuries](#) to remind kitchen staff of these safety practices.
- **Other walking surfaces:** Be sure to routinely monitor all floor areas for potential hazards such as spills or dampness, torn carpeting, and obstacles such as extension cords. Have warning signs such as "wet floor" readily available to alert people to potential danger. When installing new flooring, consider non-slip or slip-resistant surfaces such as carpet or etched tile.



Exterior

The first exposure people will encounter when visiting your organization will be the exterior of your building. Regularly inspect your exterior grounds to make sure people are safe as they come to your building and as they leave.



- **Parking lots and sidewalks:** Potholes, cracks, debris, and other hazards should be identified and corrected to prevent accidental injury. Variances in walking surfaces as little as 1/4 of an inch can cause people to trip and fall, so action should be taken to fill small cracks and permanently repair larger holes or cracks. For changes in elevation such as curbs and parking blocks, draw awareness to these hazards by painting them in a visible color such as yellow.
- **Exterior steps and ramps:** Review the condition of your exterior steps. Make sure handrails are solid and your steps are not cracking or deteriorating. Make sure there is sufficient traction as well.
- **Recreational grounds and other areas:** Consider all areas people may be walking such as recreational fields, gardens, or emergency exits. Make sure the ground in these areas is even and free from unnecessary obstacles.
- **Lighting:** Proper lighting is critical to ensuring people are able to safely traverse your parking lot and grounds after dark. Replace burnt-out bulbs in a timely manner and increase lighting where needed.
- **Inclement weather:** When poor weather strikes, your efforts to maintain your exterior walking surfaces become even more important, especially if you live in a colder climate. When temperatures approach the freezing point, ensure gutters are clear and water run-off does not congregate on walking surfaces where it can freeze and lead to slips and falls. Also, check drains to make sure they are clear. Drain openings should be appropriately sized so they won't cause trips and falls.

When the snow flies, it is important to clear snow and ice as it accumulates. Plan ahead, well before winter, to determine a plan for snow removal. Determine who will be in charge of snow removal and where snow will be moved so that it does not melt and back on walking surfaces. Clear snow and ice as soon as possible and use salt and sand as needed. Document your efforts in a [salt and sand log](#) to support your organization should an accident or injury occur.

For more information on preventing slips, trips, and falls outside your building, view our Risk Alert: [Parking lots are more than just first impressions](#).

Working from heights

Some tasks require assistance to reach items above arm's length. Whether decorating your facility or working outside, it is important to use the proper equipment to prevent serious injuries from falls. Chairs, tables, or other fixtures should never be used as a substitute for a ladder. Make sure equipment is suitable for the task at hand and is well maintained. Review our [ladder inspection checklist](#) for more tips and our article on [aerial lifts](#) if using larger equipment. If the job is just too dangerous for your staff or volunteers, don't hesitate to hire a professional.

Train your people

Beyond correcting physical hazards at your building and grounds, you can also work with your employees and members to help prevent slips and falls. Encourage people to assist in your fall prevention efforts by reporting unsafe conditions such as wet floors or damaged walking surfaces. Ask your staff to wear non-slip footwear and take care when carrying loads. A simple reminder to watch where you're going while walking and do not use a cell phone while walking may also prevent accidents.



A clear path to slips-and-falls prevention

A slip-and-fall accident is one of the leading causes of unintentional injury and death in the United States. In fact, the National Safety Council identifies slips and falls as the cause of death for 14,500 people each year, with adults 65 years of age and older accounting for nearly 80 percent of those deaths.

Preventing slips and falls is a serious issue for all organizations and a concern that should be addressed for employees, members, and guests of all ages and abilities.

The following guidelines play an important role in developing a comprehensive slip-and-fall prevention program.

Risk areas and routine maintenance

Routine maintenance is required to keep your facilities and grounds free from potential slip, trip, and fall hazards. The following risk areas should be addressed as part of a routine maintenance schedule:

- *Sidewalks, curbs, and walkways* — Seasonal changes in temperature, along with regular wear and tear, can deteriorate the condition of outdoor sidewalks, curbs, and walkways, so these areas should be inspected regularly. Concrete, cobblestone and brick walkways and curbs often settle over time, leaving a dangerous lip or uneven area. In addition, keep outdoor walkways clear of unexpected obstacles, such as roots, rocks, and acorns.
- *Carpeted floors* — Carpeting and nonskid mats offer inherent slip-resistant qualities, but they should be checked regularly for frays, tears, loose or curling edges, and bumps. All mats should be securely fixed to the floor.
- *Handicap entrances and exits* — All handicap entrances and exits should be clearly marked with appropriate signs.
- *Tile, wood, and linoleum floors* — Smooth surfaces, such as tile and linoleum, require constant maintenance to prevent slips and falls. Floors should be kept clean and free of water, oil, and grease. This is especially important in kitchens and cafeterias. Tiled or concrete floors can be etched to provide a rougher, more skid-free surface. Smooth floors also can be covered with skid-resistant mats.
- *Stairwells and steps* — Stairwells and steps should be well lit with sturdy handrails on both sides when possible. All steps should have the same rise and depth with visible edges and

should not be dangerously steep. Keep stairs and stairwells free of grease, snow, ice, boxes, and other obstacles that could cause slips and trips.

- *Lighting* — Proper indoor and outdoor lighting is crucial to slip-and-fall prevention. Outdoor stairs, walkways, and parking lots should be well lit. Conduct regular lighting inspections of your facility and replace burnt-out bulbs immediately. Remember to adjust outdoor lighting as the seasons change and as it gets dark earlier and stays dark longer.

Seasonal hazards

Snow, ice, and rain all present seasonal slip-and-fall hazards. It is important to evaluate your equipment and employee needs before each new season begins. For example, stock up on shovels and salt prior to the winter season and devise a team of volunteers or employees to handle snow- and ice-removal emergencies.

- *Snow and ice* — Clear snow and ice from walkways, parking lots, emergency exits, and outdoor staircases as soon as possible. Downspouts should be evaluated to ensure runoff does not form ice buildup on sidewalks or parking areas.
- *Rain* — Keep floors dry and alert people to potentially slippery surfaces in the event of rain. Entryways and hallways generally become slippery when wet, but also consider potentially dangerous outdoor areas, such as ramps. Preplanning and vigilance can help prevent a majority of slips and falls.

Good housekeeping

Develop written protocol that addresses floor-cleaning procedures and proper response to housekeeping emergencies, such as spills.

Determine an appropriate floor-cleaning schedule that identifies who is responsible for cleaning and the time of day cleaning should occur. Consider scheduling floor cleanings during evening hours to reduce the risk of slips and falls.

Procedures should be established to clean up spills immediately and to display signs warning people of the danger.

Cables and extension cords should be removed from floor areas. Floors and walkways should be kept clean and free of clutter or debris. All low drawers should be closed immediately after use to prevent tripping.

Visit www.churchmutual.com/slips to view Church Mutual's slip-and-fall video. The video also can be found on YouTube at www.youtube.com/churchmutual.

Visit www.churchmutual.com/98/Safety%20Resources for more safety resources.