

Slip, Trip and Fall Protection in School

Slips, trips and falls have been a major cause of injury over the years in school systems. By reviewing the following important safety guidelines, school administrators and safety committee members will be better prepared to recognize, evaluate and control these hazards.

Appropriate floor treatment areas

Use anti-slip floor finishes and other non-slip treatment materials for all common types of flooring. Because of the importance of selecting the proper anti-slip material for the individual floor, the manufacturer should be consulted for the exact product that will provide non-slip treatment for the floor in question. Non-skid mats, runners or carpet strips are highly effective in preventing slips and falls in many areas without harming the flooring or detracting from its appearance.

Walk-off mats and entrances

Walk-off mats, in good condition, should be provided at school entrances. Mats should have beveled edges to prevent them from becoming turned up, which could lead to a "trip/fall" injury. Mats should be as wide as the doorway and extend approximately 15-25 feet inside the building, if possible.

Spill control

Even the best walk-off mats eventually can become saturated on a rainy or snowy day. Therefore, a custodian should be in the area to mop up excessive amounts of water in a timely manner. "Wet floor" signs should be displayed conspicuously to warn others of hazardous conditions.

Slip-resistant strips/mats

Non-slip floor strips/mats are especially effective in preventing slips/falls in food service areas. These injuries are all too common because of the fast-paced environment in these areas. The floor strips/mats should be used in front of sinks, in dishwashing areas, and in walk-in coolers and freezers or on ramps, as needed.

Lighting intensity

Adequate lighting should be provided throughout school buildings to help prevent trips and falls.

Keep carpets in good shape

All carpeted areas should be in good condition and should be uniform to provide consistent and level walking surface for all personnel. The use of shag carpeting should be discouraged because heels easily snagged in it.

Housekeeping practices

Good housekeeping plays a key role in preventing slips, trips and falls. Designated storage areas should be well maintained and have periodic inspections that remove nonessential items. There should also be an adequate number of trash containers in cafeterias and other areas inside the building, and they should be emptied regularly. Spilled food and/or drinks should be wiped up as soon as possible, especially in cafeteria areas. Therefore, a custodian should be on duty in or just outside the cafeteria during all lunch periods. Good housekeeping practices should be used throughout the school district. These include closing filing cabinet drawers in offices and picking up pencils off hallway floors. While good housekeeping is important in hallways, stairwells and in classrooms in general, it becomes vital in areas such as shops and labs, where one slip or trip could lead to a serious accident.

Ramps and sidewalks

The following provisions should be in place: Curbs should be adequately identified by contrasting paint, and all sidewalks should be free of broken or uneven slabs. Changes in elevation need to be identified by different colors, and adequate handrails should be provided for all ramps. Sidewalks should be adequately clean and free from foreign objects, and must be adequately illuminated.

Slip, trip and fall prevention is one of the most important topics for school safety committees to discuss on a regular basis. Committee members should review this information and tailor it to meet their own school needs. By recognizing, evaluating and controlling these hazards, school personnel can strive to prevent these injuries and minimize claim costs.

