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Falls

Falls are a serious problem? When you consider that each hour in the United States 19 people are injured by falls, or that a fatal fall accident occurs every 37 minutes, you must agree that the fall problem is significant. Falls in the United States are the number two accident killer, ranking only behind traffic accidents as a cause of accidental death. Falls on the job account for about 30% of all injuries. Last year close to 1,600 employees died and over 300,000 were injured from falls on the job.

What makes falls such a problem? Most falls involve three important elements: "obstacles," "heights," and "traction." People fall off ladders or down stairways; they trip over stools and electrical cords, and they slip on water, or oil spills.

The complicated human mechanism usually allows us to maintain our balance when walking or standing. The fall problem occurs with traction is lost, unexpected obstacles are placed in our path or when we overextend the limits of our balance when working on ladders or raised platforms.

Falls can be prevented, but only if everyone on the job does his part. First, always be alert to potential fall hazards in unfamiliar surroundings. Experienced workers spot-check walkways and work areas to be sure that no trip or slip hazards exist. Even more importantly, when you find a fall hazard, make sure that something is done to correct it.

The majority of falls at work are caused by obvious hazards, most of which could have been easily corrected. Water and oil spills, small objects on the floor, electrical cords, and objects hanging out into walkways will eventually trip someone. Take a moment to eliminate these obvious hazards.

Some tips for avoiding falls are:

- Good housekeeping is essential. Do not leave loose objects on walking or working surfaces.
- Never leave water or oil spills unattended. If they cannot be cleaned up immediately, set a barrier down so that people know about the hazard.
- Never allow an object to sit on stairways or ramps. Cartons, boxes, and other obstacles are especially dangerous here.
- Report loose or damaged handrails, stairway treads, mats, and walkway runners. Sometimes even a

small worn spot can cause someone to trip.

- Wear proper footwear. Synthetic rubber soles are best on oily floors, soft rubber soles are good on wet floors. Leather soles can be extremely slippery on water or oil.
- Lighting is important in walkways. Report conditions created by burned out lights or when walkways are too dark.
- Report any floor openings that are not protected. These openings can cause very serious falls.
- When walking, do not carry loads that block your vision. If you cannot see where you are going, a trip and fall is inevitable.
- Use hand or safety rails on stairways. It is the best way to keep your balance.
- Be especially careful when working near the edge of loading docks or raised scaffolds. These tips are sensible and reasonable. Perhaps they can help you to avoid a trip/fall injury.