Preventing Driver Slips and Falls

Loss Control TIPS

Introduction

Slip and fall accidents are a significant factor in driver injuries, causing approximately 22% of injuries to drivers. Slips and falls are the most expensive type of driver accident, other than being involved in a motor vehicle collision. An analysis of a driver's job activities reveals several distinct functions, each of which presents unique exposures for slip and fall accidents. A driving employee is normally involved in:

1. operating the vehicle (including entering and exiting from the vehicle)
2. handling freight (including loading and unloading merchandise from the vehicle)
3. routine walking and climbing around the truck terminal or customer's place of business

Analyze each driver activity to identify the exposures, then develop reasonable solutions which will minimize the occurrence of slip/fall accidents.

Operating the Vehicle: Entering and Exiting

Entering and exiting vehicles (mounting and dismounting) presents a significant slip/fall hazard. Over 6% of all driver injuries result from drivers getting into, on, off, or out of their vehicles. These accidents happen in three major ways:

1. jumping out of a tractor cab, off a flatbed trailer, or out of the back of a van trailer
2. losing one's balance when climbing into or out of a tractor or truck cab
3. slipping as one transfers one's weight when entering and exiting the vehicle

Each problem may be easily corrected by following these guidelines:

- When exiting the truck or tractor cab, always climb out in the same manner you entered; that is, facing the cab. Never jump from the truck or tractor cab.
- When climbing into or out of a truck or tractor, use the Three-Point Rule (i.e., always keep three points in contact with the vehicle, either one hand and two feet, or two feet and one hand). This will provide a firm and secure platform, minimizing the likelihood of falling.
- When you transfer your weight from the ground to the vehicle, or vice versa, make sure the surfaces are not slippery or rough, due to snow, ice, oil, potholes, rocks, etc. Look at the surface so your foot doesn't unexpectedly slip on a slick surface, or twist on an uneven or irregular surface. Look before you step!!

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- When entering or exiting cars and pick-up trucks, hold on to the door or steering wheel to help you maintain your balance as you transfer your weight from standing to sitting.

Handling Freight

Drivers who load or unload freight are exposed to both back sprains/strains and slip/fall accidents. Slips and falls can result when the freight being carried is so large that it blocks the driver's view of where he/she is walking, thus presenting a tripping or slipping hazard. Preventive measures are as follows:

- Use a hand cart or some other device to move packages which are so large that they are an obstruction to the driver's vision.
- Carefully observe walking surfaces to identify any holes, raised elevations, sloping surfaces, or slippery surfaces which could cause slips and falls.
- When using a cart to move freight on ramps, *push* the cart *up* the ramp, and *back* the cart *down* the ramp. It is more difficult to control a heavy cart going down a ramp when you are above the load than when you are below the load.
- Take small steps rather than large ones, especially when working on slippery surfaces.

Routine Walking and Climbing

A major key in preventing falls initiated by slipping is to have adequate traction between the foot and the walking surface. The less the coefficient of friction between the shoe and the surface, the more difficult it is to keep from slipping.

- Wear proper protective equipment. This means using shoes with non-slip soles. The harder and smoother the bottom of the shoe, the more slippery it is. Leather soles tend to be very slippery, especially on ramps or oily surfaces. Soft rubber soles generally provide more traction. When selecting work shoes, determine the *coefficient of friction* (CoF). Most authorities indicate that 0.5 CoF is the minimum acceptable, with some shoes having a CoF of 1.1. Wet floors and dry floors will provide different levels of traction, so make sure you find out how the selected shoe compares for each type of surface.
- In the winter time, use gloves to allow you to hold onto hand railings. This will help provide support as you ascend or descend slippery stairs.
- Never run down stairs. Whenever possible, use the railing for additional support.
- Extruded safety steps do provide an excellent non-slip surface, but wet or oily "diamond plate" can be almost as slippery as a flat surface.
- Rounded surfaces, such as fuel tanks, are extremely slippery, especially when they are wet or when they have fuel on them.

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