

Slips and trips

Winter weather management

Introduction

Slips, trips and falls are the biggest cause of major injury and so it is important to do whatever possible to prevent them. Slips and trips increase during the Autumn and Winter season for several reasons: there is less daylight, leaves can fall onto paths and become wet and slippery and cold weather can cause ice and snow to build up on paths.

This guide sets out recommendations for dealing with snow and ice and is designed to help minimize the risk of slip accidents in these conditions.

Assess the risk and identify areas of concern

Develop a plan so that, when snow or ice does arrive, preparations have been made deal with it effectively. Walk around the workplace (ideally just before or around opening time) and consider the routes people tend to take and try to identify areas where snow or ice could be a significant problem, e.g. at entrances, in car parks, on sloped surfaces, or in areas that remain in shadow or that are regularly wet.

Also, look out for any blocked drains or leaking gutters that could increase the risk of ice formation. Encourage the workforce to be mindful and report such issues, as they observe them.

Plan

Devise an action plan to rectify issues and develop a strategy for dealing with snow and ice.

Consider how feasible and important it is to maintain safe access to the full site. It may be more appropriate to concentrate on critical areas and warn people that other areas have not been treated.

Consider closing car parks or entrances that are in shade or on a slope if there are suitable and more easily managed alternatives available.

Develop a strategy

Develop a strategy for dealing with snow and ice. Put a procedure in place to prevent an icy surface forming and/or keep pedestrians off slippery surfaces. To keep surfaces slip resistant and to restrict access to untreated areas, consider what to do; how to do it; who should do it; and when to do it. Snow clearance and sanding/salting is the most common method used to maintain slip resistance in wintry conditions. Consider carefully how to restrict access. Advice regarding snow clearance, sanding/salting and restricting access is provided below.

Prepare

Consider erecting suitable canopies over walkways and providing handrails on ramps. Ensure the correct materials are available, equipment and man power in place to implement your snow and ice strategy.

It is recommended that plans are communicated to staff before the event to raise their awareness of the risks and the actions that they should take, as well as to provide them an opportunity to raise their views and/or concerns.

Snow clearance

When clearing snow, think about where to stockpile it. Avoid blocking fire escapes or covering drains and try to position it so that when it melts, the water drains away from walkways in case it refreezes.

Use the appropriate tools for the job (for example, snow shovels, ploughs and/or blowers) and appropriate manual handling techniques.

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Sanding and salting

Sanding and salting should be carried out whenever frost, ice or snow is forecast or when walkways are likely to be damp or wet and the floor temperatures are at, or below freezing. Salt needs enough time to dissolve into the moisture on the floor, it is best applied in the evening before the frost settles and/or early in the morning before employees arrive. Salt can be washed away by heavy rain, it may need to be reapplied following rainfall.

Compacted snow, which turns to ice, is difficult to treat effectively with sand and salt alone. Ideally snow should be cleared before it becomes compacted. If it's below about -21 C, then it is too cold for salt to work because salt reduces the freezing point of the ice so that it melts. Below -21 C, the use of sand can help with traction but it will not melt the ice.

Maintenance logs should be maintained, including the estimated amount of snowfall, ice build-up, temperature, date and times, action taken (e.g., called contractor, used plow/shovel, applied salt/ice melt), the individual's name overseeing removal and maintenance, as well as notes for inspection and unusual conditions.

Outsourcing snow removal

As a way to manage the risk and also reduce the workload of their own staff, the outsourcing of snow removal is a common approach for many businesses in Canada.

If you decide to hire a third party for snow removal/ground maintenance, make sure you have a written contract/service agreement that clearly defines the limitations of liability and services to be performed. This should include what products will be used, under what conditions, and in which areas. Priority areas, like parking lots, walkways, driveways, stairs, entrances, emergency exits, loading docks, and drains, should be cleared regularly. Snow and ice should also be removed from the roof when it reaches over 20 centimeters (8 inches).

Restricting access

If it is intended to leave some areas untreated or to close part of the site, think about how to do this and how to make staff aware of the safe routes they can take. Signs and cordons are often useful. Whenever possible, staff should be made aware of any potential restrictions prior to the event and made aware of the 'priority routes' that are to be kept open. Physical barriers are significantly better than signs at preventing access to areas.

Precautions

Monitor the weather forecast to know when to expect snow and ice. Warn staff the day before and initiate your snow and ice strategy before it arrives.

Staff involved in clearing snow and applying sand and salt should wear warm clothing and slip resistant footwear. The very best slip resistant footwear has been shown to work in snow and ice, so consider footwear designed for use in these conditions. People will be less likely to slip with slip resistant footwear, but no shoes will be able to ensure they never slip! Review if any staff need any manual handling training.

Extra matting may be required at entrances to prevent moisture and salt residue being trafficked into buildings, as this can increase slip risk indoors. Any snow that gets walked in tends to spread beyond the entrance as it doesn't easily come off shoes and clothing. Some 'Ice Melt' treatments can leave an oily residue if they are walked into the building. Additional cleaning may also be required indoors. Cleaning should focus on keeping floors dry where possible.

Raise awareness of the risks and remind staff that surfaces may still be slippery, even if they have been treated. Also try to discourage inappropriate footwear and rushing.

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