

A Safety Message for Leadership

Subject: **Slips & Falls as the Season Changes**

Date: **November 18, 2011**

This message is intended for an organization's, facility's or company's leadership to assist in demonstrating their personal importance for worker safety.

We are now in late fall in the Northern Hemisphere and that means new weather related safety hazards to deal with on almost a daily basis. Snow has already fallen in some parts of the northeast USA and across other higher elevations around the globe. The cold and winds lead to more rain, snow, and ice to deal with over the next few months.

Slips and falls remain one of the most common and disabling causes of injuries. The winter adds to the risk as people try to gingerly navigate wet, snow covered and icy areas. Now is the time to update your facility's plan to reduce the risk of weather related slips and falls.

Reminding your work team to be careful just isn't enough. Obviously for snow falls and general accumulation, plowing and shoveling must be part of your plan. But this brings other hazards into the picture. Heavy duty snow plowing equipment often lacks visibility for the operator to see pedestrians, so highly visible and audible warning devices must be used to keep pedestrians away from the equipment. People operating snow blowers must take special precautions as well. Include a review of the safe operating instructions for each operator so that they can avoid the serious injuries that can come from trying to clear snow clogged equipment.

Don't forget eye protection! Each person must be dressed properly with skin exposure reduced to a minimum and of course footwear suitable for a snowy, icy and slippery surface. While using a snow blower to move heavy snow is preferred over manually shoveling, operators must be healthy enough to handle the cold and the equipment. For those that will shovel snow, the precautions are many. Skin exposure, back safety, lifting safely and walking safely are just a few to consider. Use shovels designed to reduce strains. And the exertion can lead to acute coronary problems.

The use of salt or similar deicing materials can be very effective in reducing the risk of slips and falls in parking areas and sidewalks. But your plan needs to be robust to handle additional snowfalls throughout the day, evening or night and the refreezing of melted ice after a time in very cold temperatures. The best time to remove snow and melt ice is just before the start and end times of the workday but don't forget that people come and go at almost all times of the day.

One of the most hazardous areas to deal with is immediately inside the entrance to buildings. Snow and water are carried into the building on the boots or shoes of people entering the building. Tile and shiny concrete floors provide little friction when wet, so your plan must include a continuous process of drying the floors in these areas. And remember that the water can be carried a long way into the building. Those little 'Caution When Wet' signs are a good reminder but they really don't prevent a slip that hurts the knees or back or a fall that can result in fractured wrists and skulls! Insist on using handrails when going up or down stairs.

As a leader, your personal attention to this issue sets the important priority for safety and your personal inspections throughout the season will demonstrate that you care for your work team and visitors. As you conduct upcoming meetings or send messages to your work team, include a reminder to them to also prepare for the snow and ice to help prevent a life changing injury!

This message is provided periodically as an aid to leadership to develop and improve their organization through a strong foundation in health and safety. Call on Leadership Safety Systems to further assist you and your team in achieving your goal of an injury free workplace.

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