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Complete Health Environmental and Safety Services

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## Have You Ever Tripped?

Have you ever tripped going upstairs, but saved yourself from a bad tumble by grabbing the handrail? The handrail wasn't there by luck – it's required by OSHA and by building codes.

When you walk on a bridge or catwalk, you have the comfort of a guardrail, to prevent you from falling to a hard floor. That's not chance; that's OSHA and building codes.

OSHA has an entire set of rules on Walking/Working Surfaces. A strange name for an apparently simple topic: making sure you don't fall down, fall through, slip, or trip.

Do you have a mezzanine, or any other elevated area where you have to go? Preventing you from falling down can be as simple as installing guard rails on a mezzanine. You can put those in yourself, if you can safely use a hammer and nails. They have to be substantial enough to hold someone who falls against them. But you can build a guard rail, with a midrail and a toeboard (to keep things from falling on people below) out of standard 2 x 4 construction lumber and posts eight feet apart.

Keeping you from falling on the same level isn't always as obvious. Why do people fall? Because they tripped over the jack handle sticking out where they didn't expect it. Because the floor was uneven. Because it was wet, and their shoes were slippery. Those are preventable.

Floors have to be in reasonably good condition. Has the building ever been remodeled? If so, did the remodelers remove or grind down any floor obstructions, such as footings that are no longer needed? Is the floor old, with spalling concrete? Missing drain covers can leave openings that are easy to trip on.

Do you make sure oil (and other chemical) spills are cleaned up right away? Oil is very slippery. So is water. The shoes you wear can make the situation worse. If you have smooth soles, you can hydroplane across the shop. That might be fun in a boat, but it isn't a good idea when you're surrounded by hard surfaces.

Good housekeeping helps prevent trips and spills. If you move that floor jack handle out of the way, the technician carrying a large part won't trip over it. If you install overhead cord reels, instead of letting cords snake across every inch of floor, your insurance adjuster is less likely to trip over the extension cord, knocking himself out and knocking that hot bulb right into the spilled gasoline (that wouldn't be pretty).

Good housekeeping has another major benefit: it keeps aisles open. It's easy to pick your way around all those things blocking the exit path when it's the middle of the day and you're in no hurry. But what if there's a smoky fire? Your facility is required to have exit signs, able to be seen in the dark. They'll help guide you to safety. But even if those signs cast enough light for you to see everything blocking your exit route, walking through a maze will slow you down and increase the chance that you'll trip over something on your way out.

You can also fall going up and down stairs. OSHA regulations cover that, too. Think about what type of stairs are easy to walk up and down. The steps are evenly and comfortably spaced. There's a handrail. Your feet can easily find the leading edge of each stair. The surface isn't slick.

Even with those precautions, you can make stairs dangerous. Do you store things on them ("I'm just putting it here for a minute" – a multiple week minute)? Do you carry big boxes or other sight-obstructing loads? Do your stairs have adequate lighting? If they're outside, do they get icy or wet? Keep them dry. Keep them clear. Make sure they have no tripping hazards, such as loose boards,

If you have a single step up or down into another room, flag it. Paint it a bright color, if you can. These can be particular hazards, because people often don't notice the change in the surface.

Do you know anyone with a damaged back or blown knee from slipping on something? Most of us do. Preventing those slips, trips, and falls seems awfully mundane. But slips and falls are the second leading cause of death in the workplace, behind only traffic accidents. They account for about a quarter of all workplace injury claims. You can take steps in your workplace to reduce the risk – to you, your employees, and your customers.

*This article is intended to provide general information (not advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or [chess@chess-safety.com](mailto:chess@chess-safety.com).*