

# Slips, Trips and Falls: A Big Problem

**T**he latest Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) rankings available show falls second only to highway crashes for causing the most unintentional deaths. Meanwhile, the National Safety Council ranks falls behind motor-vehicle crashes and poisoning, and if you look hard enough, you may find even other results. The bottom line is this, though: In the workplace, at home, or in the community, slips, trips and falls (whether from the same level or a different height) are a serious matter.

Recent studies show that homes alone account for 20,000 deaths and nearly 25 million injuries every year. About 80,000 of these injuries cause lifelong damage.

The goal, of course, is not to slip, trip or fall, but what if you just can't avoid it? Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Tuck in your chin, turn your head, and throw up an arm. It's better to land on your arm, than on your head.
- While falling, twist or roll your body to the side. It's better to land on your buttocks and side, than on your back.
- Keep your wrists, elbows and knees bent. Don't try to break the fall with your hands or elbows. While falling, the objective is to have as many square inches of your body touch the surface as possible to spread out the impact.

After a fall, calmly assess the situation, and determine if you're hurt. Get up slowly, and if you feel injured and can't stand or walk, don't panic. Call for assistance (if serious, call 911). If you're not injured, rest for a while and regain your composure before getting up. If the fall occurs at work, make sure you notify your supervisor.

One device that figures into many falls is a ladder. There are some things you can do to avoid problems, starting with inspecting a ladder each time before you use it. Ensure the rungs are in good condition and free from cracks or broken parts. Never paint a wooden

ladder because the paint can hide possible damage. If you use a stepladder with a spreader frame, fully open the ladder and lock the bars in place, as designed. Never use a folded stepladder leaning against a wall.

Most importantly, select the right ladder for the job (correct type, height and material—fiberglass ladders for electrical work, for example). Maintain three points of contact while on the rungs, and never try to overextend your reach up or to the side. Stay off the top two steps of a folding ladder and the top four rungs of an extension ladder. Use a bucket or tool belt to keep your hands free, and use a spotter to steady the ladder from below. Never let another person climb the ladder you are using.

Always face the ladder, and remain centered between the rungs. A good rule of thumb is to keep your belt buckle between the rails to avoid overreaching. The ladder's base should be on a clean, dry, level surface, with the base of an extension ladder positioned one foot away from the wall for every four feet of ladder height.

Here are some tips designed to help you evaluate the risk of slip, trip and fall hazards outdoors, in the office, and at home:

## Outdoors

Keep walkways, parking areas, stairwells, and sidewalks well-illuminated, level, and free of obstructions, snow, ice, or standing water.

Make sure water drains away from parking areas and walkways.

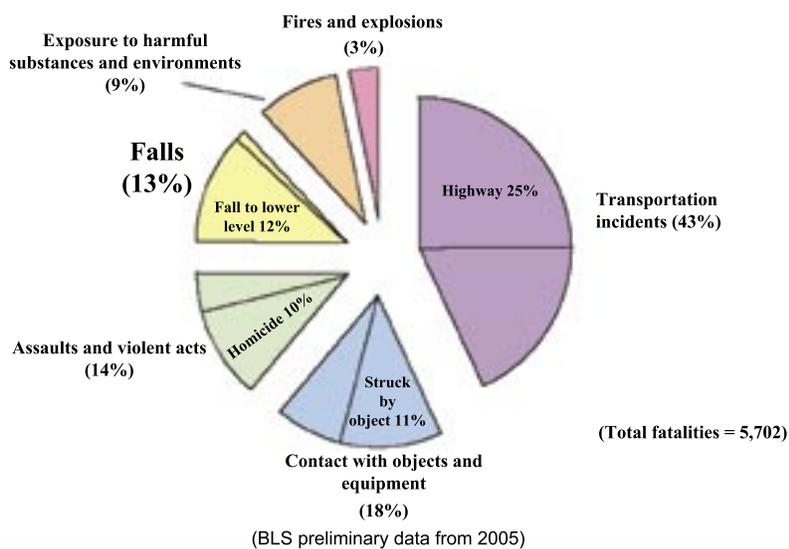
Mark changes in elevation or surface levels.

Inspect steps and walkways for broken or loose bricks, cement or stone.

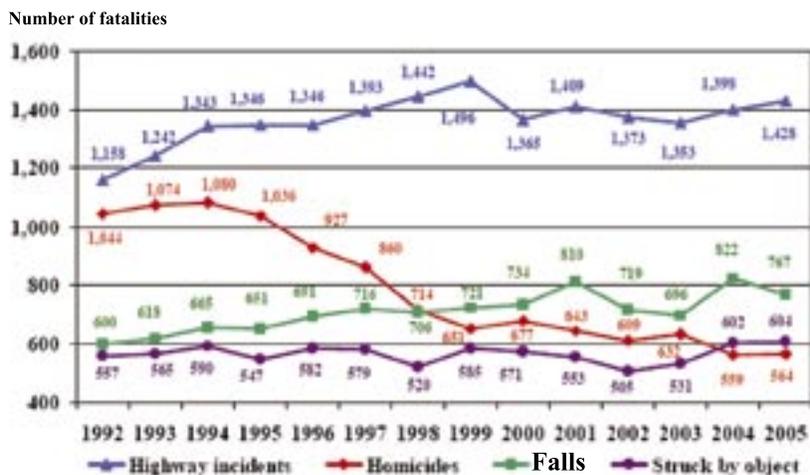
## Office

Ensure file and desk drawers open and close easily.

## Fatal Work Injuries



## The Four Most Frequent Work-Related Fatal Events 1992-2005



Inspect furniture and fixtures for sharp edges.  
Keep aisles and passageways clear for easy movement.

Provide floors with non-slip surfaces.

Maintain non-slip treads on stairways; also make sure they are equipped with standard handrails.

Ensure generator or battery-powered emergency lighting is available in stairwells and areas without natural light.

Provide small flashlights at every desk for emergency evacuation.

Maintain adequate illumination in all areas during normal, non-emergency operation.

Equip all stepstools and stepladders with safety tread.

Secure all electric cords and telephone and computer cables to prevent trip hazards.

## Home

Protect all stairs and steps with a full-length handrail on both sides.

Put non-slip mats on the floor in every bathroom.

Install grab bars in showers and bath tubs.

Use maximum wattage bulbs (as marked in fixture) in hallways and stairways, with switches at both ends.

Keep a sturdy stepstool or ladder available for out-of-reach items.

Tuck away phone and electric cords in halls and pathways but not under carpets.

Install window guards and stair gates in homes with younger children.

Use nightlights in hallways and bathrooms.

Avoid using kitchen and bathroom cleaners that leave a slippery residue. ■

### Resources:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000001-d000100/d000006/d000006.html> [Preventing Injuries From Slips, Trips and Falls]
- <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/smallbusiness/sec15.html> [Walking-Working Surfaces [Slips, Trips and Falls]
- <http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/eldfalls.htm> [Preventing Slips and Falls in the Home]
- <http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/kidfalls.htm> [Keeping Kids Safe From Home Falls].