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Slips, trips and falls in the workplace

Have you ever almost slipped, tripped or fallen?

Most people have had a moment where they nearly slipped on a wet floor, tripped over a cable, missed a step, or lost their balance while carrying something. Often, people laugh it off and carry on. However, in the workplace, a near miss of this nature must be taken seriously because the next person may not be so lucky.

Slips, trips and falls are some of the most common workplace incidents. They can happen in offices, workshops, factories, kitchens, schools, warehouses, parking areas, staircases, walkways and outdoor areas. A fall does not have to be from a height to cause serious injury. A simple fall on the same level can result in sprains, fractures, head injuries, back injuries, lost time, medical treatment, compensation claims and disruption to work.

Updated slip, trip and fall statistics

Recent statistics confirm that slips, trips and falls remain one of the most common workplace injury causes. According to the United Kingdom Health and Safety Executive, slips, trips or falls on the same level accounted for 30% of non-fatal workplace injuries reported under [RIDDOR](#) in 2024/25. Falls from height accounted for a further 8% of reported non-fatal workplace injuries. The HSE also reported an estimated 2,070 self-reported non-fatal injuries per 100,000 workers in 2024/25.

Fatality statistics also show why fall-related hazards must be taken seriously. The HSE reported that 124 workers were killed in work-related accidents in Great Britain in 2024/25. Of these, 35 fatalities were caused by falls from height, making falls from height the leading kind of fatal accident for workers in that reporting year. The same HSE report also recorded 92 members of the public killed in work-related accidents in 2024/25.

In the South African context, recent publicly available figures are less specific for slips, trips and falls as a separate category. However, the Compensation Fund Annual Report for 2023/24 reported that the Fund received 107,713 claims during the financial year. This confirms that occupational injuries and diseases continue to create a significant compensation and workplace-management burden in South Africa.

The South African Department of Employment and Labour also reported in November 2024 that approximately eight workers die in the South African construction sector every month due to work-related incidents, and that more than 60,000 construction workers die globally each year. Although this is construction-sector data and not limited to slips, trips and falls, it highlights the seriousness of fall-risk work, poor training and non-compliance.

Globally, the International Labour Organization has estimated that approximately 2.93 million people die each year from work-related factors, and approximately 395 million workers sustain non-fatal work injuries each year. These

figures reinforce the importance of preventing everyday workplace hazards, including slips, trips and falls, before they result in injury or death.

Where South African slip, trip and fall statistics are not available as a clearly separated category, it is recommended to use the HSE figures as an international benchmark and state this clearly. The figures should not be presented as South African slip, trip and fall statistics unless the source specifically confirms this.

What is the difference between a slip, trip and fall?

A **slip** usually happens when there is too little grip between the shoe and the walking surface. This may be caused by water, oil, grease, dust, wet tiles, smooth floors, poor footwear or weather conditions.

A **trip** usually happens when a person's foot strikes an object or uneven surface, causing them to lose balance. This may be caused by loose cables, uneven paving, damaged carpets, poor housekeeping, open drawers, stored items in walkways, pallets, mats or changes in floor level.

A **fall** happens when a person loses balance and comes down to the ground or to a lower level. Falls may happen on the same level, from stairs, from ladders, from platforms, from vehicles, or from elevated work areas.

Possible outcomes of slip, trip and fall incidents

Slip, trip and fall incidents can have a wide range of outcomes. A near miss may appear minor, but it is often an early warning sign that an uncontrolled hazard exists in the workplace. If the hazard is not reported, investigated and corrected, the next incident may result in injury or even death.

Possible outcomes include:

- **Near miss:** A person slips, trips or loses balance but does not fall or sustain an injury. This must still be reported and investigated.
- **First aid injury:** Minor bruising, swelling, abrasions, small cuts, discomfort or mild sprains requiring basic first aid.
- **Medical treatment injury:** Sprains, strains, soft-tissue injuries, deeper cuts, knee injuries, shoulder injuries, back injuries or head impact requiring medical treatment.
- **Lost-time injury:** The injured person is unable to return to work for a period of time, resulting in absenteeism, disruption to operations and possible compensation claims.
- **Serious injury:** Fractures, concussion, ligament damage, dislocations, spinal injuries or injuries requiring surgery or long-term rehabilitation.
- **Secondary incident:** A person may fall into machinery, vehicles, hot surfaces, chemicals, sharp objects, stairs, electrical equipment or an unprotected edge, increasing the severity of the incident.
- **Public or learner injury:** In schools, shops, offices or public-access workplaces, slips, trips and falls may also affect learners, visitors, contractors, parents, customers or members of the public.
- **Psychological impact:** A serious fall or near miss may cause fear, distress, anxiety, reduced confidence or reluctance to return to the area or activity.
- **Operational and legal consequences:** Incidents may result in investigations, corrective actions, audit findings, compensation claims, reputational harm and possible enforcement action.
- **Fatality:** Falls from height, falls on stairs, falls involving head injury, or falls into hazardous equipment or traffic areas can result in death.

Why must slips, trips and falls be included in the Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA)?

The Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment is one of the most important tools used to identify what can go wrong before someone is injured. Slips, trips and falls must not be treated as "minor" hazards. They must be identified, assessed and controlled in each work area.

A proper HIRA should consider:

- Wet or slippery floors.
- Poor housekeeping.
- Loose cables or hoses.
- Uneven flooring, paving or steps.

- Poor lighting.
- Damaged carpets, mats or tiles.
- Walkways blocked by stock, tools, bags, waste or equipment.
- Spillages that are not cleaned immediately.
- Weather-related risks at entrances and outdoor areas.
- Unsafe footwear.
- Carrying loads that block the person's view.
- Poorly maintained stairs, handrails, ramps and ladders.
- Movement of learners, employees, visitors, contractors or the public through work areas.
- Higher-risk areas such as kitchens, bathrooms, workshops, storerooms, factories, loading areas and parking areas.

The HIRA must not only identify the hazard; it must also confirm the controls needed to prevent injury. These controls must be practical, communicated and checked regularly.

Why are Safe Working Procedures important?

Safe Working Procedures explain how work must be done safely. They are especially important where tasks create slip, trip or fall risks, such as cleaning, mopping, working in kitchens, moving stock, using ladders, working in wet areas, working in storerooms, loading and unloading, or carrying equipment.

A Safe Working Procedure should explain:

- How the task must be done safely.
- What hazards are present.
- What controls must be used.
- What PPE is required.
- When warning signage must be placed.
- How spillages must be reported and cleaned.
- How walkways must be kept clear.
- What must not be done.
- Who must supervise or inspect the work.
- When defective flooring, stairs, ladders or walkways must be reported.

A procedure that is written but not trained is not effective. Employees must be informed, trained and supervised so that they understand what is expected of them.

Why are [first aid training](#) and [emergency procedures](#) important?

Even with good housekeeping, supervision, HIRA controls and safe working procedures, slips, trips and falls can still occur. For this reason, employers must ensure that suitable first aid arrangements and emergency procedures are in place. First aiders must be trained, competent and available according to the risks of the workplace, the number of employees and the type of work being performed.

A slip, trip or fall may appear minor at first, but the injured person may have a fracture, head injury, back injury, bleeding, shock or other injury that requires immediate and appropriate assistance. Trained first aiders can provide initial care, prevent the injury from worsening, activate emergency medical services where needed, and ensure that the incident is properly reported and recorded.

Emergency procedures are also important because employees must know what to do, who to contact, where the first aid kit is located, where to report an injury, how to summon assistance, and when emergency medical services are required. First aid arrangements and emergency procedures must be communicated during induction, refresher training, toolbox talks and relevant safe working procedure training.

Common examples of slip, trip and fall hazards

- Wet floors without warning signs.
- Cleaning in progress without proper barricading.

- Electrical cables running across walkways.
- Boxes, bags, tools or stock stored in passages.
- Uneven paving or damaged floor surfaces.
- Loose mats or curled carpet edges.
- Poor lighting in passages, staircases or parking areas.
- Oil, grease or food spills.
- Rubbish or offcuts left on the floor.
- Open drawers or cupboard doors.
- Poorly maintained stairs or missing handrails.
- Unsafe ladder use.
- Carrying items that prevent a clear view of the walking path.
- Rushing, running or using a cell phone while walking.

Legal and OHS requirements

Employers have a legal duty to provide and maintain, as far as reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to health. This includes identifying hazards, assessing risks, implementing controls, maintaining safe systems of work, providing information and training, and ensuring that employees are supervised.

Employees also have duties. They must take reasonable care for their own health and safety and the safety of others, follow health and safety rules and procedures, use equipment correctly, report unsafe conditions, and report incidents or near misses.

Applicable OHS legislation includes:

[Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993](#),

- Section 8: General duties of employers to their employees.
- Section 9: General duties of employers and self-employed persons to persons other than their employees.
- Section 13: Duty to inform.
- Section 14: General duties of employees at work.
- Section 17 and Section 18: Health and safety representatives and their functions.
- Section 19 and Section 20: Health and safety committees and their functions.
- Section 24: Reporting of certain incidents, where applicable.

[General Safety Regulations](#), where applicable to general workplace safety, first aid and safe working arrangements:
Regulation 3: First aid, emergency equipment and trained first aiders, where applicable.

[Construction Regulations, 2014](#), where construction work, fall-risk work, temporary access, ladders, scaffolding or work at height applies.

[Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act](#), where an employee is injured in the course and scope of employment.

Documented case example

In the case of [Bent v Rand Mutual Assurance \(Pty\) Ltd \(Appeal\) \(A120/2025\) \[2025\] ZAGPPHC 1328](#), the Court confirmed that an injury may still qualify as an injury on duty even where an employee is not actively performing their normal work tasks at the exact time of the incident. In this case, Ms Bent had finished work and was leaving the workplace when she slipped on a staircase inside the employer's premises and fractured her ankle. Although the claim was initially rejected because she was no longer performing her duties, the Court found that she was still within the workplace and using access routes provided by the employer.

This case is an important reminder that slips, trips and falls must be taken seriously in all areas of the workplace, including entrances, exits, staircases, walkways, parking areas and other access routes. Employers should ensure that these areas are included in risk assessments, housekeeping inspections, maintenance systems and incident investigations. Incidents that occur while employees are arriving at or leaving work should also be properly recorded, investigated and reported where required in terms of COIDA.

Incident reporting and IOD claims

Where an employee is injured in a slip, trip or fall incident during the course and scope of employment, the matter must be reported and managed as an injury on duty, where applicable. The employer must ensure that the incident is recorded, investigated and that the correct documentation is completed.

Depending on the employer's industry and registration, the injury on duty claim must be submitted to the Compensation Fund, commonly referred to as Workmen's Compensation, or to the applicable licensed compensation insurer, such as Rand Mutual Assurance, where applicable. The submission must follow the prescribed claim process and include the required employer, employee and medical documentation.

IOD management is important because it assists the injured employee to access appropriate medical treatment and compensation benefits where applicable. It also provides the employer with evidence that the incident was reported, investigated and managed correctly. Failure to report or submit the required documentation may delay medical care, compensation processing and corrective action.

What should management do?

- Review the HIRA for all work areas and include slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Ensure that Safe Working Procedures address the specific risks in each department.
- Inspect walkways, stairs, entrances, parking areas, kitchens, bathrooms, storerooms and work areas regularly.
- Ensure that housekeeping is maintained throughout the day, not only before inspections.
- Clean spills immediately and place suitable warning signs until the area is dry and safe.
- Repair damaged floors, carpets, paving, steps and handrails.
- Keep walkways, exits, stairs and emergency routes clear at all times.
- Manage cables, hoses and extension leads so that they do not create trip hazards.
- Ensure adequate lighting in all walking and working areas.
- Provide suitable non-slip footwear where required by the risk assessment.
- Train employees on slip, trip and fall prevention.
- Ensure that contractors and visitors are made aware of site-specific risks.
- Ensure that sufficient [trained first aiders](#) are available for the workplace risk profile and number of employees.
- Ensure first aid boxes are available, accessible, stocked, inspected and suitable for the workplace risks.
- Ensure employees know the emergency procedure for reporting a slip, trip or fall incident.
- Ensure that emergency contact numbers and escalation procedures are displayed and communicated.
- Record and investigate all slip, trip and fall incidents and near misses.
- Ensure that injury on duty claims are submitted to the Compensation Fund / Workmen's Compensation or Rand Mutual Assurance, where applicable.
- Ensure that medical reports, employer reports, witness statements and incident investigation records are completed and filed.
- Review corrective actions to ensure that the same hazards do not keep recurring.
- Include slip, trip and fall prevention in safety representative inspections and OHS committee meetings.

What should employees do?

- Walk, do not run.
- Keep work areas neat and free from unnecessary items.
- Clean or report spills immediately.
- Report damaged floors, loose mats, uneven paving, poor lighting or blocked walkways.
- Do not leave cables, bags, boxes, tools or stock in walkways.
- Use handrails on stairs.
- Wear suitable footwear for the work area.
- Follow Safe Working Procedures.
- Do not use a cell phone while walking through high-risk areas.
- Report near misses, even when no one was injured.
- Report all injuries immediately, even if the injury appears minor at first.
- Follow the workplace first aid and emergency reporting procedure.

- Provide accurate information for the incident report and injury on duty process where required.

A near slip, trip or fall is a warning sign. Do not ignore it. Report it, investigate it and correct it before it becomes an injury.

Good housekeeping, proper supervision, an updated HIRA, practical Safe Working Procedures and employee awareness can prevent many slip, trip and fall incidents. Safety starts with noticing the hazard before someone gets hurt.

The key message is that every near miss, unsafe condition, slip, trip and fall must be treated as an opportunity to improve the HIRA, safe working procedures, housekeeping, supervision, maintenance, first aid arrangements, emergency procedures, incident reporting and employee awareness.

For more information, please contact us on info@topcompliance.co.za

Yours in Health and Safety

				
Occupational health and safety auditing and consulting		Online safety shop		
				
Appointments, checklists and templates	First aid equipment	Signage	Legal posters	Safety Equipment

Courses offered by Top Compliance (Pty) Ltd

ONLINE ACADEMY - https://academy.topcompliance.co.za/		
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	Online	Onsite Excluding travel
Safety representative – Legal Liability	R980.00	R1300.00
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	R1250.00	R 1730.00
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	R735.00	R875.00
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	R735.00	R875.00
Basic Ladder Safety Course	R735.00	R875.00
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses		
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	R735.00	R875.00

Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	R810.00	R950.00
First aid		
Level 1 - US 119567 - Perform basic life support and first aid procedures – THEORY MODULE	R400.00	-

ONLINE ACADEMY - https://academy.topcompliance.co.za/		
Occupational Health and Safety Courses		
Safety representative – Legal Liability		
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability		
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment		
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Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses		
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting		
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning		

ONSITE TRAINING	
First Aid Courses:	
Level 1 - US 119567 - Perform basic life support and first aid procedures	2 days
Level 2 - US 120496 - Provide risk-based primary emergency care/first aid in the workplace	3 days
Level 3 - US 376480 - Provide first aid as an advanced first responder	3 days
Level 1 & 2 - US 119567 & 120496	3 days
Level 1, 2 & 3 - US 119567, 120496 & 376480	5 days
Level 2 & 3 - US 120496 & 376480	3 days
Child and infant CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking and AED	1 day
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	
Safety representative – Legal Liability	1 day
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	1 day
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	1 day
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	6 hours
Basic Ladder Safety	6 hours
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses	
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	6 hours
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