

FALL 2021

RISKmanager

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Wouldn't happen to me:

"ONE-OFF" INCIDENTS AND HIGH- RISK WORK ACTIVITIES

By Edgar Boord

There are several types of hazards that often lead to frequently recurring incidents. Slips/trips/falls, strains, and struck by incidents are among the most notable incident categories; however, there are many "one-off" hazards and activities that are often overlooked and can result in a severe injury. The infrequency of these hazards and incidents makes them all the more unsuspecting. In this article, we will look at many of those "one-off" issues as well as how to prevent an incident before it has the chance to unfold.



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“One-Off” Risks

- Use of floor stripper and other cleaning substances creating slip/fall potential.
- Moving/handling cafeteria tables that are heavy and contain various pinch points.
- Improper use of chairs/tables/desks instead of a stepstool/ladder.
- Maintenance using hands near sharp edges and in tight spaces that can cause lacerations.
- Obstructed view while carrying boxes and stacked materials that can cause a slip/trip/fall.
- Working from heights (ladders, loading docks, bleachers, etc.) increasing potential for severe fall injury.
- Working in an awkward/uncomfortable position for extended periods of time.
- Participation in Physical Education activities and sports that can lead to overexertion.
- Navigating outdoor grassy areas that may contain uneven surfaces (i.e., rabbit/groundhog holes).

Best Practices/Actionable Items

The above list only highlights a handful of activities and job duties that often go unrecognized as potentially hazardous to individuals; however, situational and environmental awareness is imperative to identifying risks associated with any number of tasks and activities. Here are several preventative measures to consider before carrying out a task:

- Do I have the proper footwear, outerwear/ clothing, and personal protective equipment available to carry out the task safely? If using floor stripper or floor cleaning solutions, the proper disposable footwear covers can provide much better traction than rubber-soled footwear.
- While handling/moving cafeteria tables or other heavy/awkwardly-weighted objects, wait for assistance from a co-worker to reduce potential for a strain or pinch point injury.
- Always get assistance from appropriate staff to access out-of-reach items or use a stepstool/ ladder if available instead of a chair, table or desk. These makeshift items can often tip over or shift when used improperly.

- Be sure to use ladders on an even surface, with the feet properly set and at the proper angle of 75 degrees. Always have a co-worker assist by keeping the ladder secure while working from the ladder.
- Maintain awareness of surroundings at all times while performing work tasks, especially if working at heights (i.e., loading docks, catwalks, or storage lofts/mezzanines).
- While performing tasks or maintenance using hand tools in tight spaces with sharp edges, be sure to wear gloves that provide ample protection against cuts/lacerations and impact.
- Grassy outdoor areas can contain a variety of hazards that could cause injury. Always maintain awareness of surroundings to avoid potential hazards.
- Always be sure to have ample vision while carrying materials to avoid potential for a slip, trip or fall incident. Avoid over-stacking materials to save time while carrying/handling.
- If working in an uncomfortable/awkward position, be sure to take frequent breaks and stretch out to avoid a strain injury.
- Coaches and Physical Education staff members should refrain from participating in strenuous physical activity and sports wherever possible to reduce risk of injury. If possible, ask students to carry out physical demonstrations and use verbal instruction instead.
- Never skip steps and always follow proper procedure when carrying out a task, even when in a hurry. Rushing a job for the sake of saving time can often lead to an otherwise preventable injury.

Even a seemingly simple task may have the potential to result in a severe injury. Complacency can become a major factor in this because that is when vital safety steps are often skipped for the sake of timeliness. Awareness, in conjunction with a proactive and prepared mindset, allows an individual to preemptively consider how a hazard can be minimized and an incident prevented. It is always important to take a minute before starting a new task or activity to consider the potential risks, as well as what can be done to remain safe.



virtual training fatigue:

Peering Through the Safety Lens

By Kyle Stewart

The past 18 months have brought several changes in the way business operations are carried out. The transition from in-person to virtual meetings has permitted many operations to push forward while staff worked remotely or adhered to social distancing guidelines.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations were hesitant to use virtual software to deliver safety awareness training or conduct meetings on a regular basis. Fast forward 18 months and some employees who were resistant to virtual meetings now view them as the preferred method to conduct safety training and communications. On the flip side, some employees are experiencing “virtual burnout” and would prefer to never participate in a virtual training/meeting again!

While many individuals were forced to increase their acceptance of technology, some users have mixed reactions on the value of virtual meetings to conduct safety awareness trainings/communications. From a logistical perspective, it may seem more feasible to facilitate safety awareness trainings through virtual platforms—but at what expense? Are staff members absorbing and retaining the safety information, or have they mentally zoned out.

Some employees who were resistant to virtual meetings now view them as the preferred method to conduct safety training and communications.



BLOG

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keeping schools safe at
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Risks

Although virtual meetings offered a solution to resume and continue business operations, unintended consequences impacted health and safety from an employee and facility perspective. The following safety initiatives have experienced recent disruptions or temporary suspensions:

- Lapse in providing annual safety training in lieu of other topic(s) or suspension due to time constraints.
- Suspension of hazard identification surveys of facilities/work areas.
- In-person networking with colleagues at trade/safety conferences.

Just as organizations and employees adjusted to the transition away from physically reporting to work or conducting meetings in person on a daily basis, employers and employees should now be prepared for the transition back to in-person in varying capacities.

The ultimate goal of safety awareness training is for staff members to absorb the information, allowing them to apply the safety concept within the workplace. If staff have “zoned out,” then safety training is simply an exercise and not an effective use of staff members’ time.

- If your organization’s goal is simply to document that safety awareness training was provided to staff members, virtual training may suffice as the sole delivery method. However, organizations cannot expect their safety awareness to improve, as individuals learn in different ways.
- The training topic should have a purpose! Select topics based on recurring work-related injury trends, applicable to the personnel classification, and include participant discussion.

Best Practices/Actionable Items

Before selecting the method to facilitate safety awareness training to staff members, workplace safety committees should first determine specific training needs for individual departments/personnel classifications.

Criteria to consider in determining the best method to facilitate safety awareness training should include:

- Has initial safety training on the topic been previously provided to the intended audience?
- When was training on the selected topic last provided? If greater than two years, it is wise to assume that an initial training format should be considered.
- Has there been staff turnover within the department/personnel classification since training was last provided?
- If using a safety video or canned training template presentation, has the same presentation been previously used for the intended audience?
- Is the training audience more receptive to visual, hands-on or interactive delivery methods?

When it comes to safety awareness training, the one-size-fits-all approach is typically not an effective method for most training participants.

- Training does not always have to consist of a presentation. Alternative approaches, such as brief safety discussions or small group roundtables on a more frequent basis, may produce better retention because the topic is concise and allows staff to resume normal day-to-day work tasks without substantial disruptions.
- Each training, regardless of the delivery method, should include some form of face-to-face interactions and discussions by each training participant.
- When training participants are engaged; typically, they interact with each other and/or the individual facilitating the safety training/discussion.
- Each training participant should be encouraged and required to interface as part of the safety discussion.
- The main goal of safety training is to create discussion, rather than simply providing training for employees to log in and watch! Studies suggest individuals retain more information listening and speaking on subject matter as opposed to listening alone.
- Virtual and safety training videos can serve the purpose of providing refresher training to reinforce industry accepted work task controls following a recurrence of work-related injuries or to correct unsafe work behaviors.



UNSAFE
USE OF
OBJECTS
IN LIEU OF
LADDERS

By Mark Nease



Have a safety question?

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You may find yourself this school year performing a task you can't reach from the floor. When this happens, you'll need to decide how to safely complete that task. You could have other people perform the task (transfer the risk from you to them) or pursue the task yourself (retain the risk). When you decide to do it yourself, what tool should you use to safely get yourself within reach of that overhead location?

One tool that is commonly available for this type of task is a ladder.

- Ladders come in different styles, lengths and compositions.
- Used properly, a ladder gives you the ability to access a height and with precautions, still maintain safety.
- For more information on ladders and their safe use, see "Ladder Safety" on page 6 of the Spring 2017 Risk Manager.

You also may have a stepstool nearby.

- OSHA defines a stepstool as a self-supporting, foldable, portable ladder, non-adjustable in length, 32 inches or less in overall size, having flat steps and no pail shelf. It is designed so you can climb on the top cap as well as all steps.
- A stepstool is a viable tool for accessing an area out of reach, but it can increase your risk of a fall because it doesn't allow you to maintain a three-point contact. Should your feet slip, you essentially have no place to grasp onto to keep your balance.

Safety committees should ensure the availability of enough ladders and stepstools in each building. When these tools become unavailable or are a considerable distance away, staff may be tempted to take a shortcut and use a makeshift device to access an area out of reach from the floor.

What are makeshift devices?

- Makeshift devices are any objects used in a way they were never intended.
- Makeshift devices in lieu of ladders are everywhere in schools. Tables, chairs, desktops, countertops, window ledges, books, appliances and even toilets have all been considered for use in place of ladders and all of them have contributed to a "use of an object in lieu of a ladder" accident.

RISKS

Not everyone who suffers an accident when using a makeshift device actually falls from that makeshift device.

- A hazard to using a makeshift device in lieu of a ladder is that once you complete the out-of-reach task, you now have to step back down to the floor.
- The distance from a makeshift device to the floor could be much further than the distance from the bottom step of a ladder or stepstool.
- Stepping down from that makeshift device to the floor can become a leap that your body can't handle, resulting in trauma to your ankles, knees, etc., upon impact.

BEST PRACTICES/ACTIONABLE ITEMS

There are many objects in schools that could be considered a makeshift device in lieu of a ladder.

- All these objects will increase your risk of an accident when you use them instead of a ladder.
- Let those objects be used for their intended purposes only.
- Always take the extra time to use an appropriate ladder or stepstool to complete your out-of-reach task.

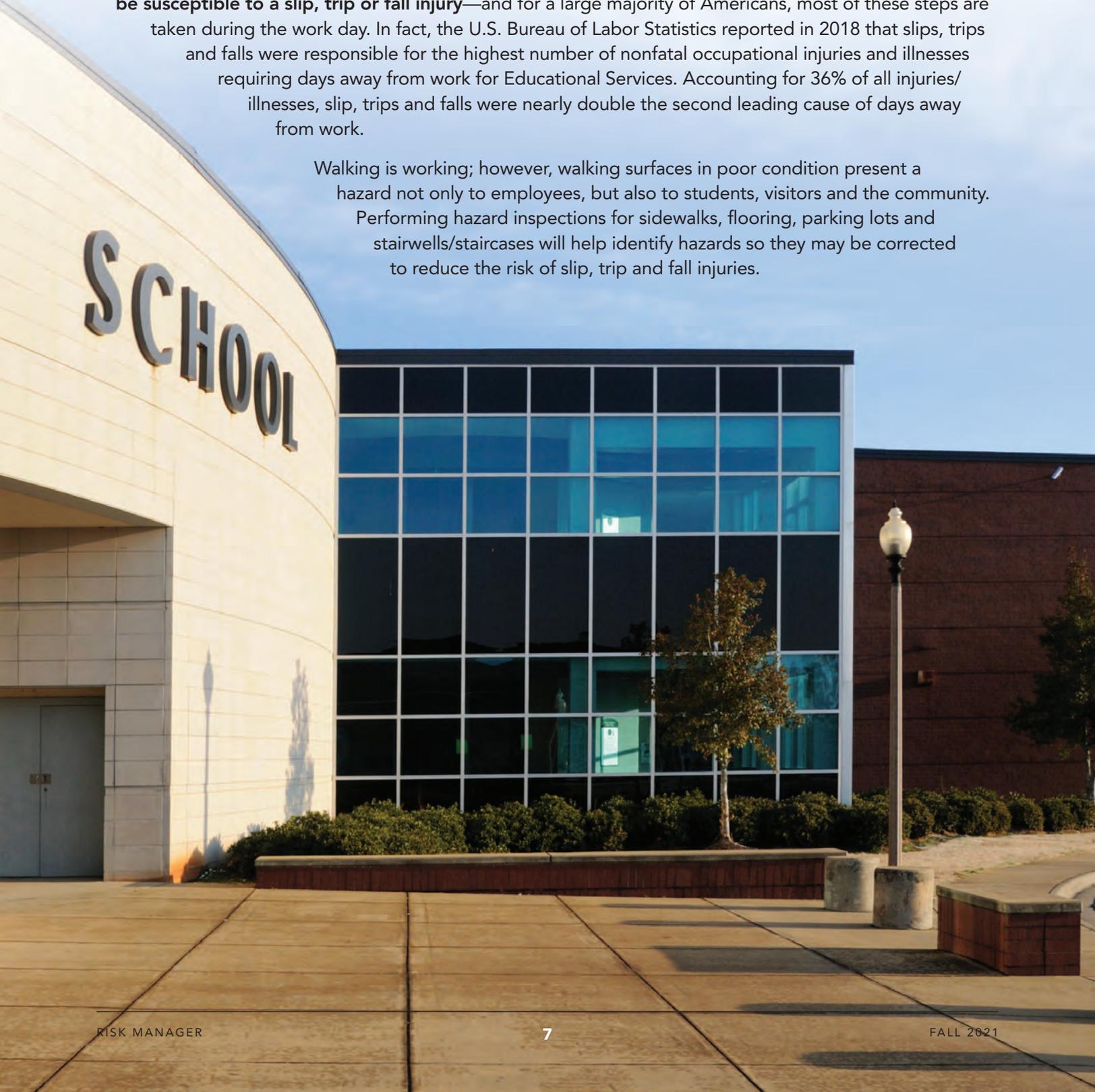
HAZARD INSPECTIONS

FOR SIDEWALKS AND WALKING SURFACES

By Jake Ruziecki

Studies show the average American walks 3,000 to 4,000 steps a day—that's **up to 4,000 chances you could be susceptible to a slip, trip or fall injury**—and for a large majority of Americans, most of these steps are taken during the work day. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2018 that slips, trips and falls were responsible for the highest number of nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses requiring days away from work for Educational Services. Accounting for 36% of all injuries/illnesses, slip, trips and falls were nearly double the second leading cause of days away from work.

Walking is working; however, walking surfaces in poor condition present a hazard not only to employees, but also to students, visitors and the community. Performing hazard inspections for sidewalks, flooring, parking lots and stairwells/staircases will help identify hazards so they may be corrected to reduce the risk of slip, trip and fall injuries.



Risks

Although slips, trips and falls are the leading cause of injury in educational services, they are arguably the most preventable, which means hazards related to these types of accidents can be identified and corrected.

- **Parking lots** are subject to stress caused by vehicles, equipment and weather changes, which can lead to settling, sloping, large cracks and missing pieces. Snow, ice, rain, leaves and other debris also contribute to temporary hazards in these areas.
- **Sidewalks and curbs** may settle, which can cause a difference in height between the sidewalk and curb. Unmarked curbs and excessive curb height also may contribute to injuries.
- **Stairwells and staircases** contribute to a number of serious and even fatal injuries every year. These areas experience a high amount of foot traffic within school buildings and may quickly develop issues with railings, lighting, stair nosings and housekeeping if they are not frequently maintained.
- **Hallways** may have unique risks associated with each building's particular design. Some hazards may include missing floor tiles, electrical cords, clutter and storage—and even weather hazards from tracked-in precipitation and debris.

Best Practices/Actionable Items

The following foundational guidelines can assist with identifying and correcting slip, trip and fall hazards, and further methods to prevent them from occurring or reoccurring in the future.

- **Administration practices** such as scheduling routine hazard inspections, maintaining documentation and following up on addressed hazards should create a fluid cycle of reporting, assigning corrective actions and following up on hazards.
- **Housekeeping practices** are critical to maintaining day-to-day safety for walking surfaces and identifying and reporting hazards as they arise. Ensure walking surfaces are in satisfactory condition and free of temporary hazards such as spills, weather related hazards and excessive storage/clutter.
- **Training staff** on identifying and reporting hazards that may be present on walking surfaces in educational environments. **Checklists** may be developed to educate staff on specific hazards to identify. These checklists also should include safety practices to prevent slip, trip and fall injuries.

By following these guidelines, you will be better prepared to avoid slip, trips and falls; budget for costly repairs to large areas of sidewalks, flooring or parking lots; and identify and report hazards before they can result in an accident.

For additional assistance in developing checklists or other resources, contact your assigned Risk Control Consultant at CM Regent Insurance Company.



BLOG

Learn more about electrical hazards at cmregent.com/blog/.



FLAMMABLE LIQUID:

Any liquid having a flashpoint below 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

COMBUSTIBLE LIQUID:

Any liquid having a flashpoint above 100 degrees Fahrenheit and below 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

FLAMMABLE+COMBUSTIBLE

LIQUIDS STORAGE

By Derek Neubauer

What do your school's art classrooms, technology education shops, theatre storage areas, maintenance garages and chemical labs all have in common? They all most likely have an area used to store flammable liquids. Whether it is spray adhesive for a paper mache project or starter fluid for the lawnmower, all flammable liquids should be stored properly.

Examples of flammable and combustible liquids found in schools:

- **ART/THEATRE** – Spray paint, spray adhesives, paint thinner, rubber cement.
- **TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION** – Spray paint, wood stains, paint thinner, WD-40, gasoline.
- **SCIENCE** – Alcohols, esters, ethers, ketenes.
- **MAINTENANCE AREAS** – Gasoline, spray paint, oil-based paint, wood stains.

All flammable and combustible liquids should be stored in metal storage cabinets. Requirements for storage cabinets include:

- Made of 18-gauge sheet metal.
- Must be double walled with 1½" airspace.
- Joints shall be riveted, welded or made tight by some equally effective means.
- Door shall have a three-point latch.
- Door sill shall be raised 2" above the cabinet bottom to retain spilled liquid within cabinet.
- Should be labeled "Flammable—Keep Fire Away."

BEST PRACTICES/ACTIONABLE ITEMS

- After using flammable and combustible liquids, always place them back in the flammable cabinet.
- When questioning if a container is full of a flammable liquid, read the label on the container. If the liquid is listed as flammable, then the container should be kept in the flammable cabinet.
- An inventory of flammable liquids should be kept to aid in reordering and to allow for enough capacity in the flammable cabinet.
- Flammable cabinets should be placed in convenient locations to allow for easy access to the areas where the flammable liquids will be used. This will assist in the ability to place the flammable liquids back in the cabinet.
- Before purchasing a cabinet, ensure the capacity will be enough to contain all flammable liquids.
- SDS sheets should be kept on file for all flammable liquids.
- Properly dispose of all unused flammable liquids.



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