



RM Quarterly – Winter 2012

Same-Level Falls Rising Nationwide

These types of falls occur when people fall to the surface they are walking or standing on or fall into or against objects at or above the surface. Falls on the same level saw a growth trend of 41.9 percent from 1998-2008, and ranked as the second leading cause of injuries producing disability in 2008, according to figures from the Liberty Mutual Group Inc. The increase reported by Liberty Mutual is indicative of an increase in falls in general.

Falls come at a great cost to both the worker and the employer. The worker can experience pain, lost wages, temporary or permanent disability, reduced quality of life, and/or depression. The employer will have a loss in productivity and business, possible increased insurance premiums, and costs associated with training a replacement worker.

From FY '05 to FY '10, Texas Tech University System Office of Risk Management managed 349 fall claims totaling \$1.6 million. These claims accounted for 26 percent of all claims with the average claim costing \$4,449.

Some common causes of falls include:

- Clutter in the way;
- Employees in a hurry, not paying attention;
- Floor surfaces in disrepair;
- Inappropriate footwear;
- Loose or unanchored mats or rugs;
- Obstructed views;
- Open cabinets, file, or desk drawers;
- Poor lighting, glare, or shadows;
- Transition from one floor type to another;
- Uncovered cables;
- Uneven walking surfaces;
- Wet, oily, or otherwise contaminated walkways; and
- Weather hazards.

Some best practices to mitigate falls include:

- Always closing cabinet, file, or desk drawers;
- Covering cables across walkways;
- Not carrying or pushing anything that prevents you from seeing obstructions, spills, etc.;
- Providing effective education, training, and supervision;
- Keeping floors maintained, clean, and dry, if possible;
- Keeping passageways and aisles clear of clutter;
- Keeping work areas and walkways well lit;
- Posting warning signs at locations of slip, trip, or fall hazards;
- Securing mats, rugs, etc. that don't lay flat;
- Using slip/skid-resistant matting where individuals encounter slippery or foreign materials on floor;
- Walking with feet pointed slightly outward, making wide turns, adjusting stride;
- Dress appropriately for your job; and
- Wear slip-resistant footwear.

No matter how cautious employees may be, sometimes falls still happen. Remember these rules to fall properly: (1) roll with the fall by letting your body crumple; (2) bend your elbows and knees, and use your legs and arms to absorb the fall; and (3) always seek medical attention after a fall to treat anything torn, sprained, or broken.

By incorporating these best practices, we can reduce the risk of falls. It requires a joint effort to provide a safe working environment through education and training of safety policies good housekeeping, and from employees must take their time and pay attention to where they are going and what they are doing. These simple practices should reduce the number of slips, trips, and falls, thus reducing the risk of injury, and lowering the cost to Texas Tech University System and its components.