

SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

Slips, trips and falls can occur both in and around the veterinary premises. Wet floors, uneven surfaces, changes in surface type (linoleum to carpet), obstructed walkways, excessive clutter, and the improper use of ladders or rolling chairs are among the most commonly associated risk factors. Slip, trip and fall injuries have also been observed in parking lots, while walking dogs (the more dogs walked at one time, the greater the chance of injury,) and when coming down stairs.

Effective slip and fall incident prevention methods go well beyond just keeping floors clean or placing a "Wet Floor" sign after mopping. It is important to focus on prevention, as well as establishing procedures on what to do if someone does get injured. Documenting the incident, collecting witness statements and any possible video surveillance can make a huge difference in defending your practice in investigations.

To reduce slip, trip and fall incidents in or around your facilities:

- Conduct a daily facility safety survey to look for common culprits, such as wet or greasy floors, loose mats, torn carpeting, bad lighting, clutter, cables or wires, and uneven floors.
- Immediately attend to any problems by putting up warning signs and/or closing an area off and taking steps to quickly eliminate the hazard.
- Do not use roller chairs or barstools to reach high objects. Use ladders or stepstools according to manufacturer safe use guidelines.
- Place mops and cleaning supplies near where they will most likely be needed. If supplies are inconveniently located they are not as likely to get used, especially when it gets busy.
- Choose flooring with a high slip resistance rating (>0.5 friction coefficient) or add anti-slip coatings to existing floors.
- Paint or apply color shade adhesive to the edges of stairs to make them more distinct.
- Maintain all floors and walkways on a consistent basis, using the recommended cleaning products and methods. If possible, fix all uneven surfaces by recoating or leveling the floor. You should mark or illuminate areas that can't easily be leveled.
- Train your employees and volunteers in slip and fall safety, and establish guidelines on how they should report problems and respond to customer injuries or hazardous situations.
- Make sure you have secure handrails for all stairs and balconies.
- Take care of your outdoor areas, including sidewalks and parking lots. Potholes, rain, snow and ice all create potential hazards. If necessary, subcontract snow and ice removal to make sure it's handled promptly and meets local legal standards.
- Replace wet entrance mats with dry mats or utilize additional entrance mats when wet weather is present.
- Ensure that employees wear appropriate footwear for the veterinary practice environment. Shoes with non-slip soles are highly recommended.
- Do not walk while looking at a cell phone or tablet. Distractions such as these can lead to injuries.
- Do not walk multiple dogs at one time.

- Document all of your efforts by keeping records of your daily safety inspections and any maintenance work to improve walking and working surfaces.
- Form a written policy and train managers on how to consistently respond and document any slip and fall claims. Important areas to cover include properly taking witness statements, providing first aid, contacting emergency responders and archiving video evidence of the event from security camera systems.
- Implement the use of a standardized, written incident report form to document any events.

SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS SAFETY QUESTIONS

What are some potential slip and/or trip hazards in our veterinary practice?

What potential hazards outside our veterinary clinic can pose a risk to employees or clients?

What steps should be taken when a spill is observed or reported and what is our practice protocol regarding who is responsible for cleaning up wet areas on the floor?

Why are shoes with non-slip soles critical to preventing injuries?

What procedures do we follow to gain access to items kept out of regular reach?

Where can we locate equipment and supplies to clean up a wet floor in our practice?

ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

OSHA Slips, Trips and Falls Powerpoint presentation:

https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https://www.osha.gov/dte/grant_materials/fy07/sh-16625-07/slipstripsfalls.ppt

CDC Slip, Trip and Fall Prevention for Healthcare Workers: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2011-123/pdfs/2011-123.pdf>