

## It's Not the Fall That Hurts

**I**t is not the fall that hurts, it is the sudden stop that jars joints and breaks bones. Slips, trips, and falls happen so quickly but there are ways to prevent them.

Slips, trips, and falls accounted for 25.8 percent of all workplace injuries in 2017. It was the third most common accident after strains/sprains (33.5 percent) and contact with objects/equipment (26 percent). Typical days lost from a fall is 12. (Source: National Safety Council Injury Facts 2017)

The safety objective of any veterinary practice is to minimize injuries by eliminating the hazards that can cause an accident. The payback is valuable. Employees do not miss time from work, operations run more efficiently, and workers' compensation costs can be contained. Controlling the hazards that contribute to these accidents and requiring slip-resistant footwear keeps the practice in good stead from a regulatory perspective, too.

The practice's policy on footwear is a good place to start. Most practices will ask employees to wear slip-resistant footwear. A good slip-resistant shoe will have an interlocking sole pattern of deep channels to prevent hydroplaning. Shoes should be flat with no heels. In large animal practices, the footwear required may be leather boots with steel toes.

Probably the most common cause of slip/fall accidents results from liquid on the floor. Cleaning up patient accidents and substance spills as soon as noticed is a good standard policy. The challenge comes when employees fail to clean up the spill WHEN it is seen. If spills cannot be removed quickly, encourage employees to place a



wet floor sign over the spill or a chair or towel over them so employees and/or clients do not walk through the substance, slipping or spreading the risk to more areas.

For areas where water or other liquids may land on the floor by nature of how the area is used, like bathing areas, the use of rubberized anti-slip mats in work and walking areas can minimize falls.

Falls also happen when objects are placed on the floor in a storeroom, walkway, or hall. When employees place objects on the floor, they are typically not placed in the same spot every time. When walking or changing direction, people are looking ahead, not down. Hoses, electrical cords, containers, and even a fellow employee's feet can contribute to a fall. Make sure walkways are kept clear and that electrical cords are taped down or covered if they must cross a walkway.

If your practice has a stairwell, make sure it does not become a temporary storage area. Not only does this present a tripping hazard, but blocking stairways violates OSHA safety standards and local fire safety regulations pertaining to emergency evacuation. Citations for these infractions can be costly.

Inspect office seating regularly. Chair seats, casters, legs, and backs can become loose or break. If a person sits down hard, a part can break and the person can land on the floor. If a chair seems to have any loose parts or appears damaged, repair or discard it.

If your practice has a kennel, barn, or stalls, inspect the floors for open drains, troughs, and gutters. If there is a 36-inch or more height difference between the floor and trough, a guardrail is needed. Drains and gutters need covers. Removable covers for gutters make it easier to remove and clean when necessary.

When people fall, they tend to get up quickly to save themselves from embarrassment. Remind employees that if they fall, to stay down until it is determined that a serious injury has not occurred.

By taking the necessary precautions as well as being aware of your surroundings and changes to conditions, the severity and even the likelihood of slips, trips, and falls can be reduced. ■

Information provided by Preferred Employers Insurance, a Berkeley Company.