

## Don't Be a 'Fall Guy'

Falls hurt—and worse: They can disable or kill. Falling injuries occur in every industry, but they can be prevented or reduced in severity by the worker who is alert. Remember, falls will cost not only your employer, but you and your family. They can cost you pain, time spent at the doctor, enjoyment that you might have had on your time off, lost income when you are out of work, and loss of mobility and the ability to do the tasks you usually do around the house. And, perhaps worst of all, people don't always recover 100 percent from falls. Permanent pain spots and reinjury points can be created.



Slippery surfaces, poor lighting, obstacles, having your vision obscured when carrying packages, and other factors can all cause falls. Be aware when hazards exist, report those which can be corrected, and take steps to reduce your own likelihood of falling down on the job.

Some of these are:

- **Staying flexible.** Those who are not limber usually have a higher center of gravity and are toppled more easily than the supple individual. Daily stretching helps.
  - **Staying straight.** The use of drugs, alcohol, even some prescribed or over-the-counter medications can alter your perception and throw off your sense of balance. Make it a point to find out any side effects of medicine you are taking.
  - **Wearing the right shoes.** Be sure that your shoes give you proper support, are the right size, don't have heels that will catch on the stair treads, and don't have slippery soles.
  - **Wearing the right glasses.** Make sure your vision is corrected and, if necessary, wear the glasses that will help you see danger. But realize, too, that glasses may cut off some peripheral vision and that stairways and ladders can be risky for individuals wearing bifocals.
- Not only can you prevent falls, but you should also be prepared to reduce the impact of falls that do occur. Decide now to walk around in an alert, balanced state, watching where you are going and ready to catch yourself quickly should you begin to slip. Here are some "safe falling" techniques to consider:
- **Your head is a heavy body part.** Don't tilt your head back as you walk up stairs, throwing off your balance. Look up with your eyes only. If you work at a height and find yourself falling, don't look down with your head either, because that will propel you forward.
  - **Gripping a nearby railing may help.** Use your thumb, along with the little finger and the ring finger to grip. The little and ring fingers actually have more gripping strength than the index and middle fingers.
  - **When falling, defend the vital areas.** It's better to have soft tissue damage than severe breaks. The head is vulnerable to serious injury and must be protected first of all. Protect it by tucking it to either collarbone. Next comes the spine and back, then the joints such as knees, wrists, shoulders, elbows, and ankles.
  - **Disperse the force.** Spread the impact of the fall over as wide an area as possible. Don't break a fall with only your hands, for instance; use the insides of your forearms along with your hands.
  - **Relax.** Athletes and stunt riders learn this important lesson early. Know how to reduce the force of impact: Yell and exhale when falling.