Thrift Store Safety: Slip, Trip & Fall Prevention

Slips, trips and falls (STF) are the second leading cause of lost-time workplace injuries in general industry. A written prevention program can help your organization minimize these types of claims.

Slips occur as a result of low friction between the shoe and walking surface; trips occur when a person’s foot contacts an object or drops to a lower level; and falls can result from either a slip or trip. Carrying and handling objects increases the risk of STFs.

STFs in Thrift Stores
Thrift stores present unique challenges to building an effective slip, trip and fall prevention program. The sheer volume of goods passing through the facility presents lots of tripping opportunities. How the goods are stored and displayed can contribute to a successful program.

Physical Factors
• Snow, ice or rain can cause a loss of traction. Snow and ice contribute to many injuries each year. The average slip and fall injury claim caused by snow and ice is approximately $14,000.
  o Develop a snow and ice removal plan.
    ▪ Keep the parking lots and donation drop-off area clear.
  o Use walk-off mats and rugs.
  o Keep ice melt close to the doors for employee use.
  o Use the WalkSafe materials available on United Heartland’s website.

• Spills on walking surfaces:
  o Develop a safety culture whereby all employees immediately clean up spilled liquids.
  o Fix or repair sources of water leaks, such as at drinking fountains.
  o Have clean-up materials readily available.

• Loose mats or rugs:
  o Keep rugs and mats tight to the floor; repair or replace as needed.

• Poor lighting:
  o Inspect the parking lots and building exterior regularly for burned-out bulbs.
  o Make sure closets and other areas have adequate illumination.

• Poor walking surfaces:
  o Repair floors and parking lots when cracks and deformities develop.

Human Factors
• Age:
  o The risk of STFs increases as we age; this may be related to balance.
• **Sight/Vision:**
  - Aside from blocking our line of sight with boxes and bulky items, the use of bifocals may prevent individuals from seeing walking surfaces clearly.

• **Footwear:**
  - Footwear can be a major contributor to slips and trips. Wear slip-resistant soles on tight-fitting footwear.
  - No open toes or beach footwear should be allowed. Require sturdy shoes be worn.

• **Fatigue:**
  - Fatigue plays a part in many injuries. As the body tires, we do not pick our feet up as high as we do in a normal gait. Take recommended breaks, and keep hydrated.

• **Carrying items:**
  - This can block our vision and offset our sense of balance. Use carts instead of loading up your arms.

**Written Program**

Develop a written program which details the expectations of leadership and employees. Define who is responsible for performing the many tasks in preventing STFs.

**Donation Drop-Off**

• A paved level surface will help minimize slips and falls.
• An awning over the drive-up lane will help keep snow, ice and rain from the area.
• Using an automated door at the receiving area has many benefits. The doors help conserve energy, the thresholds are minimized to prevent trips and they open automatically leaving both hands free for pushing carts.

**Aisles and Passageways**

• Keep the paths and aisles wide and do not place items on the floor or other furniture in these designated paths. Review the path from the donation door to the sorting area and from the sorting area to the retail floor.
• Develop a culture where employees immediately clean up any liquid spill they see.
• Utilize storage systems for safe keeping of cleaning utensils such as brooms, mops and shovels. Keeping these items up out of the way creates a clutter free work area. Serious injuries have occurred from employees tripping over these items.