

# Slips, trips and falls in nursing facilities

by Theresa Womeldorf

## Before you begin

Review your organization's safety program. Before leading the discussion, research the discussion questions about slips, trips and falls.



## Introduction

Who would think that the worst injuries for nursing facilities are falls. But, why is it falls rather than back injuries?

We make a greater effort to prevent back injuries, and we teach ergonomics with many versions of no-lift policies. These injuries are decreasing except for those based on an important variable – the resident.

To prevent an incident, the resident usually walks with a one-person assist using a gait belt to help the resident's balance. But, that resident may at any time become weak, lose his or her balance, become belligerent and/or pull away.

Now think about the workplace. A nursing home is like a home with normal functions except it has many employees doing overlapping tasks.

## Discussion

First, let's look at the kitchen and its floor surface. Here are questions you may ask.

**Q:** Is it the slip-resistant kind?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** What about the facility's footwear? Is it the slip-resistant type?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Is there water on the floor occasionally or a little coffee, milk or even a small piece of lettuce?

**A:** Yes, there is – at least every shift.

**Q:** Can you wipe everything up?

**A:** No.

**Q:** With every wipe up you need to sanitize your hands, but is that realistic?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Does everyone know the dangers?

**A:** Yes, but they may not believe they are dangers.

After reviewing these questions, how can we make the workplace safer in a multi-task, multi-person department? The answer is continual teaching with demonstrations and correcting the behavior.

For example, the dish room is the most dangerous area with its water splashes and disposal of food products. This is especially true because of the tight area where most dishwashers are located.

### **Ergonomist**

If you need to evaluate a work area, you may contact a BWC ergonomist. The ergonomist may observe the area for workers' bending, twisting and turning movements as well as splashing. In addition, an ergonomist may evaluate any heat-producing equipment.

To better understand the area's work tasks, the ergonomist may review the work flow and eliminate the areas where each employee does the work his or her own way. For example, a dish-room makeover may be the answer. But, it may not be affordable due to space issues.

To make a small dish room safer, there are many ways you can alter the room to better organize tasks and room equipment.

### **Work areas**

Walking from the kitchen onto tile or a smooth surface may cause a worker to slip and fall. Resident rooms pose similar hazards with spots of water and powder on the floors. In addition, too many items to work around in a room may make it difficult to recognize potential dangers.

Showers are as dangerous as a person walking from the kitchen wearing wet shoes. To keep from slipping in a shower, wear slip-resistant soles and wipe your feet on a small mat outside the shower.

Hallways that transition from carpet to tile can be hazardous. This is especially true if a worker cleans the carpet or wet buffs it because the worker may leave a mist of wetness on his or her shoes.

Workers use laundry areas and dirty utility rooms to rinse out soiled linen. These areas may have water spots on the floors that can be hazardous.

In addition, plumbing, climbing, snow removal and general-maintenance tasks may expose a maintenance person to areas of concern.

Nursing home employees work in areas such as activities, social services, therapy, consulting and an office environment. They walk in every area of the nursing home as well as the employee-dining area. Because there are daily spills, the dining room usually has a smooth surface floor for ease of cleaning.

### **Group action**

Are nursing facilities dangerous places to work? Yes. To prevent workplace accidents and occupational diseases, staff must keep their eyes open for safety hazards.

Teach staff members how to read wet floor signs and to immediately clean up any spill. Employees work at a fast pace. While they focus on the tasks of the day, they can easily overlook a spot on the floor until they slip on it.

Nursing facilities mop one-half of the floors at a time to allow for travel on one side. It is imperative employees look for the arrows that show which side of the floor is wet. Remind and correct an employee who walks on the side that is wet.

### **Conclusion: Need safety committee**

With many people working together in the same areas, it's hard for the left hand to know what the right hand is doing. It takes years of practice, correction and a safety committee. Your safety committee members will brainstorm possible solutions that will help your workplace prevent slips, trips and falls.

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