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ALERT

Workplace Safety

Training Key to Avoiding Slips, Trips and Falls

SLIPS, TRIPS and falls constitute the majority of general industry accidents, cause 15% of all accidental deaths, and are second only to motor vehicles as a cause of fatalities. With those stark realities, any employer that fails to guard against these preventable accidents is asking for an injury to occur.

While you can put in place stringent safety procedures, require fall-protection equipment and install non-skid surfaces, there is one thing that is hard to control: the human factor.

THE FALLOUT

Slips, trips and falls:

- Result in more than 95 million lost work days per year (or about 65% of all work days lost).
- Account for nearly 25% of all reported injury claims.
- Accounted for a 17% increase in the number of deaths from such accidents in 2020, compared to the prior year.

Slippery surfaces a major challenge

Slippery surfaces are one of the biggest challenges a business faces in protecting its employees. High-risk areas include:

- Parking lots, especially in areas where water is pooling,
- Sidewalks,
- Food preparation areas, where grease and water can cause hazards, and
- Non-carpeted entryways or lobbies.

Tip: Conduct walkway audits to identify safety issues, so that you can develop plans to eliminate them. The plans need to account for varying weather conditions.

Training

You should put together a training regimen that includes instilling in workers the importance of:

- Immediately cleaning up spills,
- Closing file drawers when done,
- Picking up loose or dropped items from the floor,
- Keeping aisles and walkways free from clutter, and
- Keeping their personal workspace clean and orderly.

But it doesn't pay to tell them once. Regular reminders can help instill safety mindedness like the above.

Changing behavior is not easy and it takes time and commitment, but the best solution is a behavior-based safety

See 'Implement' on page 2



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Employee Mental Health Leave Requests Skyrocketing

IF YOU'VE noticed a lot of employees asking for time off for a "mental health day," you aren't alone.

A recent study found that the number of mental health leave-of-absence requests has grown by a third since the COVID-19 pandemic. And, data from ComPsych, a provider of employee assistance programs (EAPs), shows that such leave requests have skyrocketed by more than 300% in the past six years.

Roughly seven out of 10 leave requests for mental health reasons are from women — in part but not entirely because of the burden and added stress of childcare.

Poor mental health is a serious problem in the workplace. Stress, anxiety, depression and substance abuse lead to reduced focus and concentration, increased absenteeism and presenteeism, higher turnover costs, and more dangerous workplace accidents.

If you're seeing a broad increase in the number of mental health-related absences, it's a sure sign that something is wrong.



WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

1. **Destigmatize mental health problems.** Create a culture where it's ok to discuss mental health issues, and to seek help.
2. **Establish an EAP.** Workers can use this program to get confidential counseling treatment for a variety of issues.
3. **Invest in mental health training for managers.** Your leaders need training on how to recognize and sensitively deal with workers experiencing mental health problems.
4. **Offer flexible work schedules.** Many minor issues can be dealt with by allowing employees more control over their work-life balance. Working from home, flex hours, job-sharing programs and generous paid-time-off policies can all help.
5. **Create a less stressful workplace.** Work to reduce unrealistic deadlines, spread the workload and maintain adequate staffing levels. Reassign or eliminate "toxic" managers.
6. **Address cost barriers to care.** Many employees can't afford to see a doctor or counselor, even with insurance. Consider adding a direct primary care benefit, which allows workers and covered family members unlimited appointments with their primary care physician with no out-of-pocket costs.
7. **Offer mental health or sick day leave.** Employers nationwide are responding to the employee mental health crisis by expanding their leave programs. In 2024, over 50% of organizations plan to add paid parental leave, paid mental health days and flexible time-off programs. Additionally, 49% are adding bereavement leave, and 37% are adding paid caregiver leave as an employee benefit.

The takeaway

Employers have a number of tools they can access to help employees who are dealing with stress and anxiety. Work can also be a cause of stress, so it's important that your staff should feel comfortable approaching their supervisors or managers if they are having trouble coping.

You can't prevent all mental health problems. But you can alleviate work stressors and provide support so that small problems don't metastasize into mental health crises. ❖

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Implement Good Housekeeping Practices in Your Workplace

approach. That includes being mindful of what they are doing.

Train workers so they will:

- Walk with caution and make wide turns at corners.
 - Test footing before committing weight.
 - Open doors with caution.
 - Use railings on stairs.
 - Ensure there are three points of contact when using ladders.
 - Look before moving and be alert for trip hazards.
 - Wear appropriate footwear.
 - Push (rather than pull) carts to allow a better line of sight.
 - Keep eyes and mind on the task in hand; no multitasking.
- Not text or talk on phone while walking.
 - Take designated walkways, rather than shortcuts. ❖

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

- Implement good housekeeping practices.
- Provide proper lighting, traction aids and require safe footwear.
- Keep walking surfaces clean and in good repair.
- Install railings and guards.
- Display warning signs in high-risk areas (like 'Slippery When Wet').

A Hacker's Tips on Keeping Your Personal Data Safe



ONE BIG concern for all of us these days is online safety and protecting our personally identifiable information and credit card information.

Not only that, but clicking on a nefarious link on a website or in an e-mail can unleash a cyber attack on your computer with bots rifling through all of your files.

In addition to online scams, criminals are also calling people and asking for personal information.

Recently, an anonymous hacker who now writes a cyber security blog had these recommendations for individuals who want to protect themselves and their files when online.

Here's the techie's advice:

- **Check senders carefully.** Cyber criminals will try to get you to click on a link in an e-mail by making it seem like it comes from an official source, like "auditor@irs.gov." If in doubt, don't click on any links and call the agency using information from 411 or other legitimate sources.
- **Don't believe every caller.** If you get a call from someone claiming to be from the IRS who tells you that you owe back taxes and face penalties that could involve asset forfeiture, you should know that the IRS doesn't make phone calls. Tell the caller that you'll call them back. Look up the number from scratch and call. More often than not, nobody will answer or the agency will never have heard of you.
- **Don't follow links to a site that's going to ask for secure information, such as a password.** "If I want to raid your bank account, or do other harm, one way I can do it is to send you an official-looking e-mail with a link to your bank, asking you to log into your account for some reason," the hacker writes. If you go to the criminal's site, they will then obtain your log-in information and have access to your bank account.
- **Verify that the visual link and the actual link match.** For

instance, let's say the link is "PETA.org." But if you move your cursor over the link without clicking, most browsers will then show you the real link, either near the cursor, or at the lower-left corner of the window. If you see something like "PETA.smurfit.org" or "PETA.ru," or anything else that doesn't exactly match, it's likely they're trying to dupe you.

- **Don't automatically grant access for all programs.** If you download a new game online and it asks you to enter the system manager password, you may be right to be suspicious as a game would not need system-level access.
- **Use unique passwords.** If you are using a new site that requires a password, use a unique password, and one that can't be found in a dictionary. In other words, don't reuse a password from another site. This way, if the site is compromised and they get your unique password, they won't be able to access other online accounts of yours.
- **When a website asks security questions, give ridiculous answers.** For instance, if a site asks which high school you went to, don't use the name of your real school. A dedicated hacker can find out where you went to high school. Instead, you might want to write something like "cuddly panda" or "fuchsia."
- **Ignore spam e-mail.** You can often tell that e-mail is spam before opening it. Look at the "From" address. Do you know anybody named "Special Offer?" If the subject is odd, like "Donald Trump says he has a big brain, here's why," it's likely spam and should be avoided.
- **Set your e-mail reader so that it does not load images or follow links automatically.** For instance, if a scammer includes an image, allowing it to load can send the image ID to another server that then gains access to your system. Before you allow the browser to load images, check that every image name is generic. ❖

California's Laws on Using Cell Phone While Driving Explained

CALIFORNIA'S WIRELESS Communications Device Law makes it an infraction to write, send or read any text-based communication on an electronic wireless communications device, such as a cell phone, while driving a motor vehicle.

That's in addition to two other laws governing the use of mobile phones while operating a vehicle:

- One that prohibits all drivers from using a handheld wireless phone while operating a motor vehicle, (California Vehicle Code [VC] §23123). Motorists 18 and over may use a hands-free device.
- The second law prohibits drivers under the age of 18 from using a wireless phone or hands-free device while operating a motor vehicle (VC §23124).

To ensure your staff knows the law, the Department of Motor Vehicles has prepared the following list of frequently asked questions:

What if I need to use my phone during an emergency and I do not have a hands-free device?

The law allows a driver to use a wireless phone to make emergency calls to a law enforcement agency, a medical provider, the fire department or other emergency services agency.

What is the fine if I'm convicted?

The base fine for the first offense is \$20 and \$50 for subsequent convictions. With penalty assessments, the fine can be more than triple the base fine amount.

Will I receive a point on my driver license if I'm convicted for a violation of these laws?

No. The violation is a reportable offense; however, a violation point will not be assigned to your DMV record.

Will the conviction appear on my driving record?

Yes, but the violation point will not be added.

What if my phone has a push-to-talk feature, can I use that?

No. However, the law does provide an exception for those operating a commercial motor truck or truck tractor (excluding pickups), implements of husbandry, farm vehicle or tow truck, to use a two-way radio operated by a "push-to-talk" feature.

A push-to-talk feature attached to a hands-free earpiece or other hands-free device is acceptable.

What other exceptions are there?

Operators of an authorized emergency vehicle during the course of employment are exempt, as are those motorists operating a vehicle on private property.

Are there exceptions for dialing?

This law does not prohibit reading, selecting or entering a phone number or name in an electronic wireless device for the purpose of making or receiving a phone call. However, drivers are strongly urged not to enter a phone number while driving.

