

# Winter Weather Slips and Falls Prevention Guide

The Next Three Seconds Protects Your Life, Your Loved Ones, Your Livelihood®

## The N3L3 philosophy:

our approach to protecting workers from fatal and life-changing injuries events.

*Eastern Alliance is here to help. To learn more about Eastern's N3L3 program and access other safety resources, sign in and visit the Safety Tools on [www.easternalliance.com](http://www.easternalliance.com), or contact your Risk Management Consultant for assistance*

**1.855.533.3444**

## Slips, trips, and falls are preventable!

As an employer you are responsible for the safety of employees once they report to work. You should be concerned about getting employees in and out of your building safely, especially during inclement weather. No industry or business is exempt from injuries that result from inclement weather. Rain, sleet, snow and ice are hazards to every business.

This Prevention Guide will provide information to assist you in preventing weather related slips and falls and provide actions you can take to reduce the potential for injuries.

### Tips for Managing Slips and Falls

- Establish who is responsible for snow and ice removal, i.e., facility managers, custodians, grounds maintenance staff and contracted snow removal personnel. Make sure that all responsible parties are aware of the specific locations they are to remove snow.
- Develop procedures for safely maintaining walkway surfaces, and educate employees on these procedures. Inform employees of the location of equipment and supplies.
- Plow, shovel and use de-icing, salting or ice melting chemicals to remove ice and snow.
- Apply de-icing chemicals before a storm, followed by snow/ice removal during and after the storm. Use plenty of de-icing materials, as using "barely enough" will leave patches of ice.
- The initial step in de-icing is choosing a de-icing agent. When selecting ice melting chemicals, here are some things to consider:
  - Rock salt (sodium chloride) is the least expensive but is somewhat corrosive and can damage concrete, interior surfaces and vegetation. It may need a wetting agent when used at low temperatures.
  - Calcium chloride and magnesium chloride are more effective than rock salt and most effective at lower temperatures. Magnesium chloride is somewhat less corrosive than calcium chloride, which is about as corrosive as rock salt.
  - Calcium magnesium acetate is the most environmentally friendly but is more expensive and is least effective at lower temperatures.
- Effective ice removal often occurs during the day with full sun. But full sun will melt adjacent snow or ice, placing water runoff on the de-iced walking surface. This will dilute the solution and tend to refreeze at night. With dropping temperatures, ice can re-form with falls occurring first thing in the morning.
- Aim for evaporation. If the water can drain (e.g., drains aren't blocked) and there is full sun or even reasonable wind, the water (even ice) will evaporate. A dry pavement is a clear indication there is no ice.
- Use a friction additive. Sand is the most popular because it is cheap. Use a lot of it. Make certain that anyone walking on the surface has a lot of traction. Be sure to clean up the residue once inclement weather is over as loose materials may lead to a slip hazard in the future.
- Check and treat surfaces every morning, especially around snow piles where melting may have created new problem areas. Reevaluate during the day and treat as needed.
- Remember that a clean-looking surface is only "safe" if it is dry. A wet surface can contain ice and also can turn to ice in the shade or overnight.
- Ensure designated parking areas are cleared prior to employee arrival and departure times.

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- Designate specific entrances and walkways closest to the specified parking locations for use during inclement weather. Ensure these areas are treated first by the maintenance crews/vendors. Once these have been sufficiently treated, the crews can move on to those other areas once the pathways for the first arriving/departing employees have been completed.
- As conditions can change rapidly, have systems in place to monitor walkways at specified intervals for ongoing treatment throughout inclement weather.
- Have all employees utilize designated walkways and enforce this practice.
- Place a bench near employee entrances for employees to use while changing footwear and donning/doffing boots or cleats.
- Have snow removal equipment and supplies readily available. Keep shovels and ice melt near all walkway entrances.
- Take advantage of technology — telephone or text to alert employees to use caution when entering building.

## Walk off Mats

- Place walk-off mats at all entrance doors.
- Inspect the mats weekly to ensure they are in good shape.
- Mats should allow for a minimum of 10 paces in the normal direction of travel in order to absorb water and snow that may accumulate at entrances during inclement weather.
- Mats should be constructed of rubber or cocoa fiber, which help remove water and dirt from shoes. The color of the mats should contrast with the color of the flooring, and mat edges should taper down to the floor for a smooth transition to the floor's surface.
- Under severe conditions, consider posting a janitorial staff member at each entrance to warn employees and customers entering the area about the slipping hazard and to manually mop any excess water that may accumulate.

## Field Operations

- Provide employees who do not report regularly to an office, such as home health aides, sales representatives, and service technicians; with kitty litter or small kits for their vehicles to treat ice or snow covered walkways as they may come upon them.
- It is recommend that employees wear slip resistant shoes wherever they may be exposed to wet surfaces and consider slip-over grips to make walking in the snow safer.

Although Eastern Alliance Insurance Group does not recommend or suggest one product/vendor over another; we have listed **some** resources below that you may find beneficial:

Consider purchasing temperature sensitive signage in which the color changes when the temperature is below freezing and placing them at employee parking lot entrances:



Have employees wear a type of traction aids such as the slip over sole grips, etc. when they are outside shoveling or doing the pavement/concrete:





# Black Ice and Winter Driving

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According to the Federal Highway Administration, more than 116,000 injuries and 1,300 fatalities occur in auto accidents on snowy or icy roads each year. A common culprit in many of these accidents is "black ice," a transparent glaze that forms without bubbles, allowing it to easily blend into the surface of the road. Decrease your chances of injury this winter by learning more about this slippery hazard. Recognize hazardous conditions. "Black Ice" is most likely to form over bridges, overpasses and shaded areas of the road. These areas have much colder surfaces and are more susceptible to sudden temperature drops such as in the early morning and evening hours. Other common problem areas are places that may rapidly freeze when air moisture makes contact—especially near lakes or rivers.

Recognize warning signs when conditions are present for icy roads, so you can be on high alert.

### Look for these warning signs:

- Black ice looks a lot like wet blacktop.
- Absence of water spray on a seemingly wet road.
- Cars suddenly swerving or skidding.
- Brake lights ahead.
- Cars or tire tracks in the ditch.
- Shiny surfaces next to a dull black.

### Use these tips to maneuver past the problem area:

- Stay Calm on Black Ice!
- Avoid making sudden moves or turning the wheel.
- Smoothly lift your foot off the accelerator and glide across the ice in a straight line until you find traction.
- Shift: If possible, slowly shift car to a lower gear for added control.
- Brake wisely: If you begin to skid, firmly press on your brakes to activate the anti-lock brake system (ABS). Or, if you don't have ABS, pump the brakes gently.
- Avoid spinout: If your front end is sliding, steer in the opposite direction of the skid; if the back end is sliding, steer in the same direction.
- Look toward where you want to go: Avoid looking where you think you might crash—you might inadvertently veer the car in that direction.

### **Avoid the Potential for Accidents. To stay safer on the road this winter exercise these preventive measures:**

- Check road conditions before you travel.
- Never use cruise control when road conditions are uncertain or changing.
- Don't rely on all-wheel drive for ice—it won't help you gain traction.
- Slow down and don't tailgate.
- Use snow tires.



# Snow Safety — Snow Blowers

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Each year, hundreds of people suffer injury or amputation of their fingers or hands due to the improper handling of snow blowers. We would like to provide information to help you avoid these injuries during the winter season.

The American Society for Surgery of the Hand states that snow blower incidents occur to the operator's dominant hand in 90% of all reported injuries, and amputations of tips of fingers are the most common occurrence.

### Injuries are typically caused when:

Injuries from snow blowers typically occur when the equipment jams or clogs. In this scenario the operator attempts to remedy the situation by reaching into the equipment to free the clog. Although the machine may be off, the blades may still be rotating or begin rotating once the clog is relieved. The contact with the rotating blades results in severe injury to the hand.

The best way to prevent these types of injuries is by reducing the occurrence of jams and clogs.

- Complete snow blower operations frequently throughout snow falls to minimize the snow accumulation, specifically with icy, sticky, slushy or refrozen snow.
- Apply non-stick snow blower spray to the blower to make it less likely for the snow to stick.
- Operators should keep a brisk pace, as a slow pace will increase the likelihood of clogging.
- Use the de-clogging tool periodically to clean off the equipment. If equipment clogs often, the company should consider investing in a new or more powerful snow blower.
- Equipment should be maintained regularly.

### REMEMBER—if your snow blower jams:

#### Turn it OFF!

- Disengage the clutch.
- Wait at least ten seconds after shutting the machine off to allow impeller blades to completely stop rotating.
- ALWAYS use a stick, broom handle, or unclogging tool to clear impacted/clogged snow.
- NEVER place hands, feet, or any body parts into the intake end or exit chute or around the blades. Keep all body parts away from moving parts.
- Keep all shields, guards and safety devices in place.

### Other Snow Blower Safety Tips:

The company should designate who is permitted to operate the snow blower and ensure adequate coverage with varying shifts and locations. The operators should receive instruction on correct, safe operation prior to operating the equipment and provided refresher training prior to each winter season. The owner's manual should be utilized for specific machine instructions. Operators should demonstrate correct operation.

Safety tips for operators:

- Read the owner's manual thoroughly and understand all of the recommended safety procedures before turning on the snow blower. Ask your supervisor to clarify anything you don't fully understand.



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- The snow can sometimes hide objects that might clog the chute, or otherwise cause damage. A pre-start inspection should be conducted to clear the area of doormats, boards, wires, newspapers and other debris. For those items that may be present year-round or routinely, make note of their location and see these are removed.
- Never throw snow towards people or cars, and never allow anyone in front of the snow blower.
- If you have to repair or unclog your machine, disconnect the spark plug wire, or for electrics, disconnect the cord.
- Dress properly for the job. Wear adequate winter garments and footwear that will improve footing on slippery surfaces. Wear safety glasses and avoid any loose fitting clothing that could get caught in moving parts. Long hair should be tied up.
- Follow all manufacturer recommend maintenance schedules, including pre-season tune up.
- Handle gas carefully. Avoid spillage by using non-spill containers with spouts. Fill up before starting, while the engine is cold. Remember: Store gas in a clean, dry, ventilated area, and never near a pilot light, stove, or heat source. Never smoke around gasoline.
- Do not clear snow across the face of slopes. Use extreme caution when changing direction on slopes. Do not attempt to clear steep slopes. Identify slopes that may need to be cleared during snowfall and create an alternative plan for this process.
- Never operate the snow thrower without good visibility or light.
- Always be sure of proper footing and keep a firm hold on the handles.
- Walk — never run.

**Remember, if you're uncomfortable with the work, aren't quite sure what you're doing, need additional education on the topic, or need additional resources (time, materials, tools, equipment, training, PPE, etc.) to complete the job in a safe manner, communicate this with your supervisor, IMMEDIATELY!**



# Snow Safety — Shoveling

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## The following tips can help you get a "handle" on safe shoveling:

- Consider equipment alternatives to manual shoveling.
- Prior to winter, identify the areas that need to be shoveled during snow fall.
- Designate what employee will be tasked with shoveling. Make sure snow removal is provided in the job description and provided to the pre-hire physician to determine fitness for duty.
- Take it slow! Ensure scheduling provides ample time to complete the task. Consider work-rest cycles or job rotation. Shoveling (like lifting weights) can raise your heart rate and blood pressure dramatically, so *pace yourself*. Be sure to stretch out and warm up before taking on the task
- When possible, try to shovel fresh snow. Freshly fallen, powdery snow is easier to shovel than the wet, packed-down variety. Pay attention to the weather reports and create a schedule that helps accomplish the removal of fresh snow.
- Provide smaller shovels to prevent overexertion from a large load.
- Straight handled shovels are best used when lifting/scooping snow. This type of shovel should be considered in heavy and/or deep snows.
- Curved handled (ergonomic) shovels are meant to push snow, rather than lift/scoop snow. The curved nature of the handle is designed to reduce stress on the lower back when pushed, but if used for lifting, increases the stress as compared to a straight handed shovel. This type of shovel should be considered if snow is light and not very deep.
- Snow pushers resemble a snow plow blade and are not meant for lifting/scooping snow because of their size. If used where expansion joints in the surface are present (e.g., concrete walks or driveways) they should be run across the surface at a slight angle to help it travel more smoothly and reduce the risk of the blade dropping into the small gaps that can cause it to stop abruptly giving the operator an unexpected jolt.
- Educate employees who will be performing shoveling work on the following:
  - Push the snow as you shovel. It's easier on your back than lifting the snow out of the way
  - Don't pick up too much at once.
  - Lift with your legs bent, not your back. Keep your back straight. By bending and "sitting" into the movement, you'll keep your spine upright and less stressed. Your shoulders, torso and thighs can do the work for you.
  - Do not work to the point of exhaustion. If you run out of breath, take a break. If you feel tightness in your chest, stop immediately.
  - Dress warmly and in layers. Remember that extremities, such as the nose, ears, hands and feet, need extra attention during winter's cold. Wear a turtleneck sweater, cap, scarf, face protection, mittens, wool socks and waterproof boots.

Remember, if you're uncomfortable with the work, aren't quite sure what you're doing, need additional education on the topic, or need additional resources (time, materials, tools, equipment, training, PPE, etc.) to complete the job in a safe manner, communicate this with your supervisor, IMMEDIATELY!



# Snow Removal from Rooftops and other Elevated Surfaces

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Every year, workers are killed or seriously injured while performing snow or ice removal from rooftops and other building structures, such as decks. It is likely no surprise to you that based on the finding of OSHA investigations, most of the fatal and life-changing injuries associated with snow removal at heights are caused by falls. Here are a few examples that show how this is a reality.

- In the process of removing snow from a roof, a worker lost his balance, slid off the roof and struck his head on construction materials stored below, resulting in a fatal head injury.
- While shoveling snow and applying grid lines on a second-story deck, a worker was fatally injured after falling through an unprotected elevator shaft opening.
- An employee was standing on a 12-foot ladder to clear snow from a low-pitched roof. The ladder slipped and the employee fell hitting his head on the ladder and then on the concrete. He died from his injuries.

In addition to falls, other significant hazards during this work include amputations from equipment, collapses, tip-overs, entrapment, suffocation, electrocution, frostbite, hypothermia, and overexertion. As with any hazard, it is extremely important to plan ahead for safe snow removal.

**Planning should begin prior to winter months to ensure adequate time, thought, and resources are given to this hazardous activity.**

The company should consider the following:

- Who should do the work?
  - Consider eliminating the risk for your employees through risk transfer to an experienced, insured contractor.
  - If considering conducting the work internally, evaluate if your company has the knowledge, competency, and resources to perform the work safely. If these elements are not present, the risk must be transferred or these elements must be achieved before beginning the work.

**These questions will assist you in developing the knowledge, competency and resources needed to do this work safely:**

- Can alternative snow removal methods (snow rakes, heater strips, etc.) that do not involve workers going on the roof or elevated surfaces be used?
- Are there any hazards (skylights, roof drains, vents, leading edge, etc.) on the roof that might become hidden by the snow? If so, how can they be safely marked so the workers can see them?
- How should snow be removed, based on the building's layout, to prevent unbalanced loading?



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- Where will removed snow be relocated? Will it create additional hazards for walkways, entrances, or pedestrians below? If so, how will this be addressed?
- What are the maximum load limits of the roof? What amount of snow and ice accumulation requires the removal?
- How does the estimated total weight of snow, snow-removal equipment, and workers on the roof compare to the maximum load limits of the roof? If it will be over the limit, what will be your next steps?
- What tools, equipment, protection devices, clothing, and footwear will workers need?
- How will workers access the roof or surface safely? What surfaces will they be working on? What fall protection will be used to protect workers?
- How will mechanized snow removal equipment and other equipment be safely elevated to the roof?
- Is equipment such as ladders adequate for conditions or will they create additional hazards?
- How will the company ensure workers are knowledgeable, competent and confident in performing the tasks required of them? (i.e. operating equipment, using ladders and lifts, wearing fall protection, etc.)
- Has the company developed a stop work policy and educated employees on the importance of this?
- Who, when, and how will the process be audited to confirm hazards are being controlled and when additional needs exist?







# Preventing Hypothermia and Frostbite

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Hypothermia occurs when body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Do you know how to recognize hypothermia and what to do?

Symptoms of hypothermia include fatigue, drowsiness, uncontrolled shivering, bluish skin, slurred speech, clumsy movements, irritability, and irrational or confused behavior. Here are some tips for what to do if a co-worker appears to be suffering from hypothermia:

- Call for emergency help, and move him or her to a warm, dry place.
- Remove wet clothing and replace with warm, dry clothing or wrap the person in blankets.
- Give the victim warm, sweet drinks if the person is alert.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, or hot chocolate) or alcohol, because they hinder the body's heat-producing mechanisms and will cause the body's core to drop.
- Have the victim move arms and legs to create muscle heat. If they are unable to do this, place warm bottles or hot packs in the armpits, groin, neck and head areas.
- Finally, do not rub the victim's body or place them in a warm water bath. This could stop the heart.

Hypothermia is not the only danger of working in cold conditions. Frostbite occurs when deep layers of skin freeze. Symptoms include pale, waxy skin and numbness in the affected area. Frostbite usually affects fingers, hands, toes, feet, ears, and nose. If a co-worker seems to be suffering from frostbite:

- Move him or her to a warm, dry place.
- Do not rub the affected area. This might damage the skin. Instead, gently place the affected area in warm—not hot—water for 25 to 40 minutes.
- When normal feeling and color have returned, dry the skin, and wrap the affected area to keep it warm.
- Seek medical attention.

**To prevent frostbite and hypothermia, remember these simple safety rules:**

- Dress warmly in waterproof and wind-resistant clothing. Wear several layers to provide the best protection.
- Wear a hat and gloves. Remember, up to 40 percent of your body heat can be lost if your head is uncovered.
- Wear insulated, waterproof boots to protect against cold and dampness.
- Take frequent short breaks in a warm, dry place to allow your body to warm up.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages, but avoid caffeine or alcohol.
- Finally, eat warm, high-calorie foods on meal and snack breaks.



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While the danger from winter weather varies across the country, nearly all Americans, regardless of where they live, are likely to face some type of severe winter weather at some point in their lives. Winter storms can range from a moderate snow over a few hours to a blizzard with blinding, wind-driven snow that lasts for several days. Many winter storms are accompanied by dangerously low temperatures and sometimes by strong winds, icing, sleet and freezing rain.

One of the primary concerns is the winter weather’s ability to knock out heat, power and communications services to your home or office, sometimes for days at a time. Heavy snowfall and extreme cold can immobilize an entire region.

The National Weather Service refers to winter storms as the “Deceptive Killers” because most deaths are indirectly related to the storm. Instead, people die in traffic accidents on icy roads and of hypothermia from prolonged exposure to cold. It is important to be prepared for winter weather before it strikes.

## Before Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

To prepare for a winter storm you should add the following supplies to your emergency kit:

- Rock salt or more environmentally safe products to melt ice on walkways. Visit the Environmental Protection Agency for a complete list of recommended products.
- Sand or kitty litter to improve traction.
- Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
- Sufficient heating fuel. You may become isolated in your home and regular fuel sources may be cut off. Store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
- Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
- Make a Family Communications Plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS). Be alert to changing weather conditions.
- Minimize travel. If travel is necessary, keep a disaster supplies kit in your vehicle.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.



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## During Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

- Stay indoors during the storm.
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy, walkways.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- Watch for signs of frostbite. These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia. These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms of hypothermia are detected, get the victim to a warm location, remove wet clothing, warm the center of the body first and give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the victim is conscious. Get medical help as soon as possible.
- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive: travel in the day; don’t travel alone; keep others informed of your schedule; stay on main roads and avoid back road shortcuts.
- Let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive. If your car gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).
- Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three feet from flammable objects.
- Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- If you will be going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55°F.

Source: <http://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>



# Winter Driving — Snow and Ice

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The best alternative is to not drive in adverse weather conditions, but if you have to drive here are some tips to help keep safe. According to the National Safety Council:

## Ways to help avoid potential accidents:

- Check the road conditions - Be aware of snow/ice buildup and the likelihood of black ice on the road surface.
- Accelerate and decelerate slowly.
- Slow down and do not tailgate the driver in front of you. (Keep an 8-10 second follow distance)
- Use snow tires and all-wheel-drive vehicles to assist in proper traction.
- Do not use cruise control features as road conditions are subject to change.
- Avoid using your parking brake to slow or stop.
- If possible, do not stop when going uphill.

## If you come across a snow or ice covered patch of road in your commute, use the following tips to help avoid collisions:

- Avoid making sudden moves or turning the steering wheel.
- According to Edmunds.com – If your front tires begin to skid, smoothly release the accelerator, leave your hands where they are and allow the car to slow down.

Remember, the best alternative is to not put anyone in harm’s way while driving in adverse weather conditions.



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Winter weather-related slips and falls become a serious hazard as conditions often make for wet or icy surfaces. Be aware of your hazards and take all measures to prevent these types of accidents, both inside and outside. Lookout for the following:

- Wet leaves
- Muddy areas
- Snow
- Black ice
- Interior roof leaks

## How to call awareness to winter slippery surfaces:

- Provide awareness training
- Conduct short departmental safety meetings
- Educate employees on reporting hazards immediately
- Develop an inclement weather plan prior
- Train employees to walk slowly and take small steps
- Use walk-off mats at all entrances
- Hang slip and fall posters throughout your facilities (around time clocks, break and high-traffic areas)
- Train employees to fall the “right” way.  
*Relax:* Try not to stiffen and tense your muscles  
*Absorb:* Let your arms and legs give like a spring to absorb the impact of the fall  
*Roll:* Move with the direction of the fall to minimize injury

## What should your employees do to reduce slips and falls?

- Instruct employees to clean up spills, drips and leaks immediately
- Remind personnel to use wet floor signs and barriers
- Designate employees in different areas to inspect floor mats
- Put safety before fashion! Employees should wear shoes or boots with slip resistant soles and carry their work shoes with them
- Encourage employees to use handrails on stairs
- Walk in designated areas that have been treated or cleared
- Walk! Don’t run. Always use designated sidewalks and walkways. Employees should walk with their arms by their sides for balance. They should bend their knees a little and take slower steps

With a little awareness and an emphasis on proper maintenance, most if not all slip-related accidents can be prevented.

Most of all, emphasize an N3L3 mindset. Take 3 seconds to think consciously through the process —those 3 seconds may save your life, your livelihood and return you safely home to your loved ones.