

Preventing slips, trips and falls in winter weather



The changing seasons produce unique weather-related conditions that can create hazards for patrons, employees and the public. Hanover Risk Solutions has developed the following suggested procedures to help mitigate the risk of a winter weather slip, trip or fall injury on your premises.

Winter snow and ice removal

- All exterior walkways, parking lots and building entrances should be cleaned of snow and ice, and treated with ice melt, one hour prior to the opening of business. Any snow or ice that has accumulated between cars will also need to be removed.
- Snow and ice that has been removed should be placed in areas that will minimize hazards as it melts, for instance, in lower elevations of the property. Storm drains should be marked with reflective stakes before winter weather begins, so they can be kept clear to drain off melting water.
- Snow should be cleared from safety equipment such as fire hydrants and fire department connections to the sprinkler system. This equipment should be marked with reflective stakes before winter weather begins. Exit doors should be cleared of snow, and tested to ensure they can be opened fully.
- Exterior walkways, parking lots and building entrances should be inspected periodically throughout the day and re-treated as needed. Ice and snow often melt in sunnier areas or during warmer parts of the day, and refreeze in shady areas or as the day gets colder. Drains can become clogged, causing melt water to build up.
- Use a form such as the [Snow and Ice Control Record](#) to document inspections as well as snow and ice removal.
- Take precautions to prevent employee injuries during snow and ice removal. Ensure employees are fully trained in the use of snow blowers, plows and other equipment. Keep bystanders away from equipment. Take adequate rest breaks. If removing snow loads from roofs or ice from gutters, use proper fall protection and protect skylights and other hazards.
- During the autumn, periodic inspections should be made and action taken as needed to ensure walkways are cleared of leaves (wet leaves are a slipping hazard).

Mats and runners

Where mats have been used to control wet areas in entry ways to the building, the following conditions require immediate action:

- If pedestrian traffic leaves wet foot prints when stepping off the mat, the mat needs to be replaced with a dry one or an additional mat needs to be placed at the end of the first mat.
- If the mat has become wrinkled or bunched up, it needs to be reset so it is flat and doesn't present a tripping hazard.

Note on contracts

It is important to check contracts with snow/ice removal contractors and mat rental/service companies carefully, to be sure that the schedules and methods of service are appropriate for your facility and the weather conditions your business is likely to face. Be sure that responsibilities are clear in the contract. Contracts should also include hold harmless agreements and insurance requirements (consult your legal professional for specifics). For further information, see our document on [Contract Management](#).

Exterior lighting

Colder weather means shorter daylight hours. Be sure exterior lighting of the building, walkways and parking lot is adequate for building occupants and extended hours of darkness.

- Adjust sensors and timers on exterior lighting to come on earlier during the winter months. If tenants are responsible for updating timers, send reminders advising them to change their timers.
- Conduct exterior lighting inspections at dusk, dark and dawn to determine lighting coverage, and to evaluate shadowing, places of concealment (for purposes of security) and effectiveness. Ensure lights are angled appropriately to provide maximum lighting capacity and avoid shadowing.
- Inspect exterior lights/lamps for bugs, dirt, nests, cracked cover plates, yellowed acrylic covers and blown bulbs. Check that bulbs have not faded or lost their illumination capacity. Inspect light poles for stability.
- Match lighting needs with the needs of the population accessing the building. For example, a medical office building may see greater senior traffic than an industrial park, and therefore require more lighting.
- Evaluate lighting choices for specific exterior lighting needs, for instance, the benefits of LED (light emitting diodes) vs. HID (high-intensity discharge). Quality LED lights come on immediately; HID (high-intensity discharge) lights can take several minutes to warm up and generally do not work well with occupancy sensors, because once the lights go off, they need re-strike time to come back on. Assess the benefits of LED vs. HID in cold climates. (Newer "pulse start" HID bulbs operate better in cold weather, and have shorter warm-up times and re-strike times than older "probe-start" HID bulbs.)
- Consider hiring qualified contractors, lighting designers or lighting professionals to help evaluate conditions, recommend needed changes, do repairs where needed, keep up with technology and conduct regular preventive maintenance of exterior lighting conditions.

Incident investigation procedure

Should a slip, trip or fall occur, follow the procedures outlined below.

- Helping the injured person will be the primary concern immediately following an incident. Never leave the person alone. If assistance is needed, send someone else or have someone stay with the person while you get help.
- If the injured party is not an employee, do not discuss liability or fault for the incident. If they ask if you are going to pay for their medical costs, simply state that someone from Hanover Insurance will be in touch with them.
- Protect the incident scene to prevent anyone else from getting hurt and to preserve the scene in an "as is" condition to help ensure an accurate investigation. If any hazardous conditions must be corrected to prevent injuries to others, take "before" and "after" photos.
- Contact the supervisor of the area where the incident occurred so they can begin the collection of data and incident investigation.
- The information should be collected and the analysis completed using a form such as our [Accident Investigation Report](#).
- Photos should be taken of the general area, any defective conditions and anything else that could be considered a contributing factor to the incident.
- Once the root cause is determined, corrective action should be initiated immediately.

Corrective action procedure

When a hazard has been identified through an incident investigation or a facility inspection, maintenance personnel or an outside contractor must be notified so that the problem can be corrected. The following procedure is recommended to accomplish this task:

- Be sure that all employees are aware of specific actions to be taken in the event a hazard is identified, particularly if they will be responsible for mitigation.
- Any problem identified by any employee or brought to the attention of staff by the public should be communicated to the appropriate manager immediately.
- The manager responsible for facility maintenance should inspect the problem and communicate the best action to take. This may include in-house personnel correcting the hazard, contacting the responsible outside contractor, or both.

- If the hazard can't be corrected immediately, a temporary control (such as barriers or hazard tape) should be put in place to prevent anyone from being injured.

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