

Managing Slip & Fall Risks During Winter Months



During the winter months, exposure to slip and falls greatly increases due to weather conditions such as freezing rain, snow, and ice. Public agencies in New Jersey must plan to protect their workers and visitors from slipping on icy surfaces. This bulletin offers suggestions for a comprehensive program to minimize the hazards to employees, residents, and visitors.

The goal of an effective inclement weather plan is to remove snow and ice from all walking surfaces and incorporate continuous surface monitoring and removal at critical times such as work starts, at shift change, and when melting and refreezing occurs. Plans should be in writing and reviewed after every snow season. Pay special attention to common trouble spots such as parking areas, sidewalks, stairs, and ramps. About one-third of all slips on icy surfaces occur in parking areas.

If contractors are used, verify they have the proper levels of insurance. Work with your risk manager so the necessary certificates of insurance and hold harmless certificates are on file. Agencies should walk the areas to be cleared with contractors to identify features such as curb lines, speed bumps, drainage layouts, etc., and plan how and where snow and ice will be controlled.

Investigate pre-treatments and anti-icing agents. The science of chemical agents and delivery methods is always evolving. Evaluate guidance on anti-icing product effectiveness, temperature use, advantages and disadvantages, environmental impact, and cost per coverage area when deciding.

Use the same planning process if agency employees will be responsible for snow and ice control. We recommend using a site plan to designate areas for cleaning and should include curbs, fire hydrants, speed humps, walkways, and other items. This also facilitates updating your plans.

When possible, direct roof downspouts into underground drains versus being directed onto walkways, driveways, or other walking surfaces that could freeze.

Frequently inspect the parking area and sidewalks for:

- Lighting – well-illuminated areas permit greater visibility to avoid icy areas.
- Drainage – melt that cannot drain to sewers or grass will become ice when it refreezes.
- Dislocated or damaged items – curbs, wheel blocks, and similar items are frequently moved or damaged by plows, creating new hazards to users.
- Cracks in the sidewalk – snowmelt and water get into the cracks and freeze and overtime/continuously freezing and refreezing expands the crack, elevating the risk for trips and falls.

Also, remember getting in and out of vehicles is one of the most frequent types of slip and fall exposures. Inspect vehicles to be sure step treads, running boards, and grab bars are all in good condition

Best Practices:

- Monitor weather forecasts. Do not be caught unaware of impending winter weather. Look for constancy in the forecast and follow meteorological guidance from professionals in the field. Many common mobile weather apps only provide the forecast data of one model run, which provides data as much as 2 weeks out. If there is a forecast for a foot of snow a week out, the chances of that happening are very slim, but it is important to note there is at least a signal for the potential for winter weather. If you follow weather discussions from professionals, you will notice how they only start to provide their “first call” snow accumulation maps 48-72 hours before the event starts.
- When possible, barricade parking lots until they are completely plowed and treated before permitting vehicles to park. This will prevent patches of ice between vehicles, which can present an ongoing slip and fall hazard to employees and visitors.
- Plan where to pile snow. Subsequent melting-refreezing cycles can create icy patches.
 - Do not block drains and downspouts.
 - Pile on the low side of walkways so run-off does not flow across paths of travel.
 - Do not create obstacles to pedestrian access areas such as bus stops, fire exits.
 - Utilize grassy areas so run-off is absorbed into the ground.
- Talk to employees often about your commitment to preventing slip and fall injuries. Encourage them to report icy conditions and other concerns. Publically acknowledge and thank those who do. Consider establishing a slip-trip-fall prevention committee during the winter months to focus on these hazards.
- Discuss footwear with employees. Does your policy permit reasonable exceptions to offer shoes for icy conditions? For employees who must work outside, there are many add-on devices to improve traction. Any employee clearing snow and ice should be encouraged to wear such devices. Consider them as Personal Protective Equipment. Inspect work boots to verify soles are in acceptable condition.
- Establish a monitoring system to spot black ice. Give special attention to walking surfaces during early morning hours, at shift change, or before employee and visitor arrival.
- Provide salt/sand at entrances and expect employees to protect their welfare and the safety of visitors by using it, and not waiting for someone else.
- Do not overlook lobbies and other entrances. Provide a sufficient number of caution or wet floor signs for vulnerable areas. Entrances should have recessed gridding or mats to scrape/clean shoe bottoms. Entrances should be monitored throughout the day and dry mopped as needed.
- Transitioning from outside to inside presents different hazards. In addition to downward light from the sun, snow also reflects that light up, making it extra bright outside. Pedestrians need to adjust their gait as they move from outside sidewalks to inside flooring. Remind workers to walk with short, deliberate steps where the mid-foot strikes the ground first (not the heel). Eyes must also adjust from outdoor light (and glare) conditions to the interior light.
- Slips at the heel are the most common slip occurrence. When walking in slippery conditions, the body should be centered over the feet. Pay attention; do not become distracted with your phone, reaching for keys, etc. Avoid walking with your hands in your pockets or carry large objects. Use railings whenever possible.
- Remind workers to look before getting out of vehicles. If the area is icy, they may want to park in a different spot. Test potentially slippery surfaces by tapping with a foot before committing to them. Use the vehicle for support. Face the vehicle and use the 3-points of Contact Rule. Always have both hands on the car as stepping into or out of the vehicle.