

# Talks **ZONE**

**Safety Talks**  
**direct to your**  
**Inbox!**  
**T4910**

## Stay safe on stairs, walkways

**S**tairways and walkways have been around for thousands of years. They can be found just about everywhere, and for that reason are easy to take for granted, from a safety standpoint.

They are a common location for slips and falls, which rank second behind automobile accidents as the most frequent cause of injuries in North America.

For this reason, building code requirements can be very stringent for stairs and walkways (especially temporary ones). However, even though good design can reduce considerably the possibility of losing one's balance, it cannot eliminate the risk entirely.

Not surprisingly, most falls from stairs and walkways result from loss of balance, and, as is the case with many injury-causing incidents, they often involve inattention and unsafe behaviour.

Injuries can be avoided by paying attention to how and where you are walking. Stairs that are too steep or not steep enough can create the potential for trips and falls. Be cautious of worn or broken steps, and of insufficient lighting that can make it difficult to see properly. Never run up or down stairs, and avoid skipping steps.

If you have to carry a load while climbing stairs, carry it so your vision is not blocked, and keep one hand free, if possible, to hold onto the wall railing.

Good housekeeping is vital to stair safety.

Nothing (such as nails or splinters) should be sticking out from the surfaces of stairs, handrails or bannisters that could cause a fall.

Spills, wet spots, or any debris should be cleared away immediately, as should ice and snow.

Broken or malfunctioning lighting should be repaired or replaced.



Here is a checklist to help ensure stairway safety in the workplace (measurements may vary slightly according to requirements in your jurisdiction):

- Standard handrails on all stairways have four or more risers.
- All stairways are at least 90 centimetres (36 inches) wide.
- Stairs angle no more than 50 degrees and no less than 30 degrees.
- Step risers on stairs are uniform from top to bottom.
- Steps are designed or provided with a slip-resistant surface.
- Stairway handrails are located between 80 and 86 centimetres (30 and 34 inches) above the leading edge of stair treads.
- Stairway handrails have at least 8 cm (three inches) of clearance between the handrails and the wall or surface they are mounted on.
- Where doors or gates open directly on a stairway, a platform is provided so the swing of the door does not reduce width of the platform to less than 50 cm (21 inches).
- Where stairs or stairways exit directly into any area where vehicles may be operated, adequate barriers and warnings are provided to prevent employees stepping into the path of traffic.

vided to prevent employees stepping into the path of traffic.

■ Stairway landings have a dimension in the direction of travel at least equal to the width of the stairway.

Proper housekeeping and attention to how you use them also applies to walkways. Here is a checklist to determine if they are as safe as possible in your workplace:

- Surfaces are covered with non-slip materials.
- Holes in the floor, sidewalk or other walking surface are repaired properly, covered or otherwise made safe.

■ Clearance is safe for walking in areas where motorized or mechanical handling equipment is operating.

■ Materials or equipment are stored in such a way that they will not interfere with the walkway.

■ Changes of direction or elevation are readily identifiable.

■ Walkways that pass near moving or operating machinery, welding operations or similar operations are arranged so employees will not be subjected to potential hazards.

■ Adequate headroom is provided for the entire length of any aisle or walkway.

■ Standard guardrails are provided wherever aisle or walkway surfaces are elevated more than 80 cm (30 inches) above any adjacent floor or the ground.

■ Bridges are provided over conveyors and similar hazards.

Regular inspection helps ensure the safety of stairways and walkways, but hazardous conditions can appear quickly. Do not hesitate to remedy a problem if you see it.

The material contained in this document has been prepared from sources believed to be accurate and reliable. Application of this information to a specific worksite should be reviewed by a safety professional. Anyone making use of the information set forth herein does so at their own risk and assumes any and all liability arising therefrom. Specific medical advice should be obtained through consultation with a physician or other trained health care practitioner.

## The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

1. Slips and falls are among the leading causes of injury in North America.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
2. Do most falls from stairs and walkways result from inattention and unsafe behaviour?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_
3. Which of these is a good housekeeping practice for stairways:
  - A. No nails or splinters sticking out from stairs, handrails or bannisters.
  - B. Spills, debris, ice and snow cleared away as soon as possible.
  - C. Broken or malfunctioning lighting repaired or replaced.
  - D. All of the above
4. The angle of stairways should be between 30 and 50 degrees.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
5. The risers on stairway steps should be:
  - A. Made of wood.
  - B. Brightly coloured.
  - C. Uniform from top to bottom.
  - D. Slightly curved.
6. Stairway landings should have a dimension in the length of travel at least equal to the width of the stairway .  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
7. Changes of direction or elevation of a walkway should be:
  - A. Gradual.
  - B. Properly lit.
  - C. Easy to identify.
  - D. Bilingual.
8. Are handrails or guardrails installed where needed on all stairways and walkways in your workplace?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW \_\_\_\_

**ANSWERS:** 1. True, 2. Yes, 3. D., 4. True, 5. C., 6. True, 7. C., 8. Your answer

## Hold These Thoughts

As today's safety talk points out, accidents can happen on even the best designed stairs or walkways.

Failure to maintain them properly can invite serious problems — and that is where housekeeping comes in, as it does throughout any workplace.

All walking and working surfaces should be kept as clean, dry and unobstructed as possible. Where structures such as stairs or platforms are temporary, they must be built to a standard that minimizes risk to those who work on or near them.

Housekeeping, whether on a construction site or in an office, is a never-ending process. If you wait until the end of the day, then clean up and place things in order, you've probably missed the point.

A good housekeeping program must include careful planning, a clean-up schedule or policy, continuous supervision and inspection.

In addition to slips, trips and falls, poor housekeeping can result in:

- Being hit by falling objects.
- Striking against projecting, poorly stacked or misplaced items.
- Cutting, puncturing or tearing of skin on nails, wire or steel strapping.
- Exposure to hazardous substances.
- Fires and explosions.

Safety aside, the benefits of good housekeeping are numerous:

- Reduced handling to ease the flow of materials.
- Better control of tools and materials, including inventory and supplies.
- More effective use of space.
- Reduced property damage by improving preventive maintenance.
- Less janitorial work.
- Improved morale.
- Improved productivity (tools and materials will be easy to find).

If your housekeeping needs improvement, there's no better time than now to get started.



# Weekly Safety Meeting

## For the Record

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

In Attendance:

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

## It really happened...

A storage tank was taken out of service for repair of its stairs and their vertical supports. The method was to work from the ground to the top, removing every second step and the vertical supports so access to the tank could be maintained. However, because of the state of the supports, the job was modified and two steps in succession were removed.

The hazard was recognized and the area clearly identified by way of hazard tape. Workers passed up and down safely several times past the gap in the stairs, but on the way down at the end of the second day, an employee stepped into the gap and fell to the ground. He was taken to hospital but died a short

time after arrival.

This incident shows that stairways and walkways not only must be used properly under ordinary circumstances, but that maintenance procedures also must be safe. In this case, a quick fix was used longer than anticipated.

It is essential to consider whether quick fixes are adequate considering the risks, and whether those risks are communicated to all employees.

As the company in this case identified corrective measures, it reviewed the adequacy of its temporary barriers as well as the effectiveness of quick fixes and whether they were being relied upon too much.

**Note: *TalksZone* weekly safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.**