



Stair Safety

According to the National Safety Council, in 2009, 28,000 Americans died as a result of falls and more than 8.7 million were injured by a fall. At churches insured by GuideOne, falls are the most frequent cause of injuries, ranging from scrapes and bruises to fractures and even death.

Numerous factors associated with stairs can contribute to slips and falls including; improper design, missing or damaged handrails, inadequate lighting, poor condition and lack of maintenance. The following guidelines will help reduce your chances of slips and falls from stairs:

Stair Design

Stairs should be consistent in design as any slight change in distance and height can disrupt a person's walking stride and increase the chances of a fall. Consider the following:

- The stairway should be at least 44 inches wide.
- The height of each step (riser) should be between 7 and 7.5 inches, and the width (tread) should be between 9 and 10 inches.
- If the steps have a smooth surface, install anti-slip material to the tread, which will provide traction.
- If the stairs are carpeted, ensure that the edge is noticeable.
- If stairs or stairways exit into any area where vehicles will be operated, adequate warnings and barriers should be installed to prevent individuals from stepping into the path of traffic.

Handrails

Any flight of stairs having four or more risers should be equipped with a handrail. Additional guidelines include:

- Handrails should be within 44 inches of grasp for any person standing on any portion of the stairs.
- Handrails should be between 34 and 38 inches high.
- Handrails should have a diameter of 1.25 to 1.5 inches, positioned at least 1.5 inches from the wall and extend beyond the stairway so the user can maintain their hold on it while taking the last step to the floor.
- Handrails should be in good condition without any physical damage and adequately secured in place.

Lighting

Inadequate lighting can be a major contributor to slips and falls, as hazards can be difficult, if not impossible, to see when proper lighting is not provided. Ensure your facility complies with the following:

- Lighting should be provided for stairways. Look for shadows that may be created, and adjust lighting accordingly.
- If possible, provide a light switch at the top and the bottom of the stairs.
- Inspect all lighting on a daily basis, and replace light fixtures or bulbs that do not work.

Maintenance

Properly maintaining stairs can drastically reduce the slip and fall potential. Follow these guidelines:

- Routinely check the stairs for damage to the carpeting, tile, etc.; and immediately make repairs if necessary.
- Look for cracks, decay, or uneven points in the concrete in outdoor stairs.
- Stairways and landings should be kept clear of storage or any other materials. Never use a stairway for temporary storage.