

TITLE: 2452 SMALL FALLS ARE A BIG DEAL

LENGTH: 19 MINUTES

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2005

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

In this video, Martin Lesperance recalls stories of fall injuries he has attended as a firefighter and EMT to make the point that small falls can be a big deal. Some of the worst fall injuries don't always involve someone plummeting from a high place such as a 100-foot chemical tank; they result from simple incidents like a trip over an unsecured rug or a slip on a slippery substance. While these types of falls rarely make the evening news, they can result in broken bones, skull fractures and other disabling conditions. Martin also stresses that we can prevent most fall injuries by recognizing and controlling all fall hazards we encounter.

Topics include the importance of wearing proper footwear, recognizing and controlling slip and trip hazards, transitional areas and changing walking surface conditions, correcting fall hazards, situational awareness and moving from one level to another.

SHOOTING LOCATION: A variety of industrial and office environments

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: After watching the program, viewers should be able to explain the following:

- Why even the most commonplace slips, trips and falls must be prevented;
- The importance of recognizing, controlling and correcting fall hazards;
- Why we must maintain "situational awareness" when fall hazards are present;
- Why we must be extra careful when moving from one level to another.

PROGRAM OUTLINE:

KILLER FALLS

- There are some places you just know you don't want to fall down from—the top of a 300-foot cliff or metal stairs leading up to the top of a 100-foot oil tank.
- If you fall down something like that, you just know you're going to be seriously injured if you survive at all.
- These types of falls are known as "killer falls."
- You don't have to fall 100 feet to have a serious injury; you don't have to fall 100 feet to have a killer fall. It could be as mundane as slipping on some ice in the parking lot or as simple as tripping over a pallet on a loading dock or rushing down a few stairs.
- If you're involved in a killer fall, it doesn't really matter if it was spectacular or it was mundane; you're still dead.

NICK'S FALL

- When Nick fell, he ended up landing on his face, breaking his jaw and knocking out some teeth.
- He also landed with enough force to hyperextend his neck, causing a high spinal cord injury. Nick was paralyzed from the neck down.
- He had to have a hole put in his throat with a tube that is connected to a breathing machine that had to do his breathing for him. This is one of the most devastating injuries that can happen to a person.
- Nick fell down four steps; that's all it took. He tripped on the top stair and went face first.
- Nick didn't die as a direct result of his injuries, but shortly after he hit the ground he wished he were dead because his quality of life was so greatly reduced.
- For him, a good day was being assisted into his wheelchair by two nurses and being pushed down the hallway of the hospital so he could sit there for two hours to get a change of scenery.
- He was only able to communicate by little whispers through the hole in his throat. He told Martin he wished he were dead; four years later he got his wish.

BROKEN LEG FROM SLIP ON RUG

- One of the worst broken legs Martin has ever dealt with didn't happen in a motor vehicle collision or when a forklift backed over someone; it happened when a lady was walking to her front door to receive a pizza delivery.
- As she walked up to the door, she stepped on a rug that slipped out from underneath her. She ended up snapping her leg.
- When the EMT's arrived, the bottom of her foot was facing up and the bones were sticking out. The leg was almost amputated.
- At the emergency room, the attending orthopedic surgeon looked at the leg and said he wasn't sure if her leg could be saved.
- This happened from a same-level fall; small falls are a big deal. It was certainly a big deal for her and it was certainly a big deal for her family.
- Like all falls, it didn't have to happen. It could have been prevented.

PROPER FOOTWEAR

- Certain types of shoes are engineered for certain types of floor surfaces and conditions.
- The same shoe tread that provides good traction on a smooth cement floor may cake up with ice and snow when worn in wintry conditions. The boot designed to grip well during rugged outdoor use may provide no traction on a slick tile floor.
- This is why your company may require specific types of shoes be worn in various work areas. Keep in mind this is for your own safety; it prevents injuries.
- Wearing proper footwear won't prevent falls all by themselves; we need to understand that the decisions we make and the actions we take each and every day have a direct impact on our own personal safety.

RECOGNIZING AND CONTROLLING SLIP AND TRIP HAZARDS

- One key to avoiding injuries from falls is learning to recognize and control slip and trip hazards. Like many aspects of workplace safety, your attitude and awareness play a large part.
- When traveling through the workplace, keep a sharp lookout for any obstacle that may lead to a slip or trip. This includes open file drawers, potholes, extension cords, air hoses, tool boxes or other obstacles in our path of travel.
- When working outdoors, be especially cautious around uneven surfaces, walking on inclines and when traveling along unfinished or temporary walkways such as those on construction sites.
- In order to notice these types of hazards, you have to watch where you are going. You can't be reading a report, dialing a cell phone or shouting across the facility to a co-worker and expect to notice any fall hazards at the same time.
- Safe walking is similar to defensive driving; always travel at a safe speed, make a habit of scanning your path of travel and pay extra attention at intersections or in unfamiliar areas.

TRANSITIONAL AREAS AND CHANGING CONDITIONS

- One of the best pieces of advice Martin has ever heard concerning fall prevention is "never walk or step where your eyes already haven't been." This is especially true in transitional areas.
- For example, when you come inside a building and it's been raining or snowing out, one of the first things you do is shake off your coat or your umbrella. You stamp your feet to get rid of the mud, snow and water.
- Hopefully, this mud, snow and water ends up on the floor mat, but quite often it ends up on the slick tile floor in front of you. This is a transitional area; you're going from outside to inside, from one walking surface to another.
- If you're not careful and don't take a good look at the floor before you come barreling into the building, you're liable to end up on the floor just as well.
- Not only do you have to be careful when going from outside to inside, you also have to know what conditions you may encounter on the other side of any door or around the next corner.
- For example, the bathroom floor may be wet and slippery, there may be ice on the side walk or the warehouse floor may be covered in vehicle fluids. To avoid these hazards, you just have to watch where you are going.
- Also be aware that conditions change. The rain that was falling when you arrived at work may have turned to ice when it's time to leave or the pathway that was clear 10 minutes ago may have a cord pulled across it.
- There are countless reasons why a fall hazard may suddenly appear in your path and it only takes a second to look ahead, before you step, to see what you are stepping into.

CORRECTING FALL HAZARDS

- What do our actions say when we step over a piece of pipe laying on the floor and we continue walking? It says you don't care enough about the safety of your co-workers to correct an obviously dangerous situation.
- A fall hazard left uncorrected is simply a fall postponed, while a fall hazard that is corrected is a fall prevented.
- When you see a hazard that may cause a slip or an obstacle that may cause a trip, take the time to correct it if you can do it safely. If you can't, mark it in some way so your co-workers can see the hazard and contact someone who can correct the situation.

KEEPING YOUR WORK AREA FREE OF FALL HAZARDS

- Noticing and correcting unsafe conditions is great, but better yet is performing your job and maintaining your work area in a condition so these fall hazards never exist in the first place.
- See if you recognize any of these unsafe practices:
 - 1) Pulling a welding hose across a walkway, even if it's just for a short moment, creates a hazard;
 - 2) Leaving a drawer open in an office can lead to a trip;
 - 3) Allowing materials to overflow into a walkway creates hazardous obstacles;
 - 4) A poorly-kept work area turns tools and materials into slip and trip hazards; and,
 - 5) Storing items or allowing materials to accumulate on stairs creates a dangerous condition.
- No matter what kind of work we do, whether it's accounting, welding, construction, sheet metal work, assembly line work or heavy maintenance, falls can be prevented. They can be prevented by good housekeeping practices, smart storage techniques and by maintaining an awareness of where we are and what is going on around us.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

- One thing we need to guard against is that we don't become so focused on one task that we become oblivious to everything around us.
- For example, a firefighter may become so focused on rescuing a child from the second floor that he neglects to set up his ladder safely. This not only causes the firefighter to fall, but wastes precious moments for rescuing the child.
- The air force calls this "situational awareness." A pilot can get so focused on one task such as following the leader's wingtip or locking his bomb sight on a target that he loses situational awareness. When a pilot loses situational awareness, he can fail to see an approaching missile because he's concentrating so hard on dropping bombs or he could end up following his flight leader in to the ground because he's concentrating so hard on keeping that perfect formation.
- Not too many of us are in a position to crash a fighter jet, but here's what we will do:
 - 1) We'll walk off of loading docks because we're struggling so much with a pallet jack;
 - 2) We'll step off of trucks, forklifts and utility vehicles and completely miss the step or the handhold;
 - 3) We'll walk off of scaffolding and we'll lean so far out from ladders because we're trying to finish the job and people will be seriously injured and people will die; all from losing the situational awareness.

SEEING WHERE YOU ARE LOOKING

- Many falls occur when people attempt to carry objects that block their view. Not being able to see your feet or your path of travel is a dangerous situation that can quickly lead to a fall.

- Another reason for falling to see fall hazards is traveling in areas with poor lighting or no lighting. Report poor lighting conditions right away so they may be corrected; when working in areas with temporary lighting, make sure it is adequate for safe travel.
- Be careful when coming in from a bright area to a dark area. Give your eyes time to adjust before proceeding.

SNOW AND ICE

- Those of us who experience snow must be especially careful because a few inches of snow can hide four-by-four pieces of wood, holes in the ground, ice, rocks, pipes and other objects that are just waiting to snap an ankle.
- If you do have to walk in snow-covered areas, if possible, try to walk on shoveled sidewalks. If you can't do that, use caution because you never know what the snow can be hiding.
- Realize that you're walking on ice and this is a potentially dangerous situation. Creating an awareness of the added danger can help you act safer.
- Walk on sanded areas. Use handrails. Don't rush. Take short steps and take your time; your safety is more important than your time.
- You may even consider purchasing some special devices that you can strap to your shoes that have little spikes on them to give you added traction.
- A good pair of work boots can be one of your best defenses against an injury or a broken ankle; besides giving you added traction, boots give great ankle support. To get the ankle support they're designed to give, the boot laces have to be done up.

MOVING FROM ONE LEVEL TO ANOTHER

- Changing levels adds to the danger because a slip, trip or a simple loss of balance not only causes a fall. Now you are falling from a height and the higher you fall from, the faster you're going to fall; the faster you fall, the more force you're going to hit the ground with; the more force you're going to hit the ground with, the more damage is going to be done to your bones, your flesh, your spine and even your brain.
- That's why you have to be careful when using ladders and step stools. More important is that you do use them. People use boxes, chairs with wheels on it, the hood of their pickup truck, their spouse and almost anything else they could use to reach up.
- What also has a major impact on fall injuries is what you land on. Just think what would happen if you fell off a ladder in your backyard and landed on your child's bicycle, just think of the damage that pedal can do to your teeth, your throat, your spine or your head.
- If you fall off something just a short distance above the ground and land on the corner of a tool box, the injuries are going to be much more serious. If you land on a piece of rebar sticking up from a concrete form, that's enough to drive it right through you.