Stairways & Ramps – The Forgotten Fall Zones in Facilities Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Stairways and ramps are used every day, so it’s easy to forget how quickly they can turn dangerous. Wet steps, worn treads, poor lighting, or clutter can turn a routine walk into a sudden fall, leading to sprains, broken bones, head injuries, or long-term mobility issues. Because these areas connect busy parts of a facility, one fall doesn’t just hurt the person involved, it can disrupt operations, block access routes, and put others at risk as well.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

The danger with stairways and ramps is that falls happen fast and often without warning. A missed step, a slick surface, or a moment of distraction can lead to a loss of balance, sending someone down hard surfaces with little chance to recover.

Why Falls on Stairs and Ramps Are More Severe?

Stairs and ramps increase fall severity because of elevation, forward momentum, and hard landings. A slip can turn into multiple impacts, increasing the risk of broken bones, head injuries, and serious trauma. Even a short fall can cause significant injury due to awkward body positions and repeated contact with steps or railings.

Hidden and Overlooked Hazards

- Wet or slippery steps and ramp surfaces
- Worn treads, damaged nosing, or uneven steps
- Poor lighting or shadows that hide edges
- Clutter, cords, or objects left on steps or landings
- Missing, loose, or unused handrails

These hazards often blend into the environment, making them easy to miss during routine movement through the facility.

When Risk Increases

Risk is higher when people are rushing, carrying items that block their view, using phones, wearing worn footwear, or moving through stairs and ramps during cleaning, bad weather, or low-light conditions. Fatigue and familiarity with the area can also lead to complacency and missed warning signs.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Stairways and ramps are transition zones where people tend to relax their attention, but they require the same focus as any active work area. Small distractions or shortcuts in these spaces can quickly lead to serious falls.

Safe Practices for Using Stairs and Ramps

These practices focus on slowing down, staying aware, and making small adjustments that greatly reduce fall risk.

1. **Slow Your Pace and Stay Focused:** Rushing, multitasking, or checking your phone makes it easy to miss a wet step or uneven edge. Move at a controlled pace, especially at the top and bottom of stairs and ramps were balance shifts suddenly.
2. **Use Handrails as a Safety Tool:** Handrails are not just for emergencies. Keeping at least one hand on the rail helps maintain balance and can stop a slip from turning into a hard fall.
3. **Keep Your Line of Sight Clear:** Avoid carrying loads that block your view of steps or ramp surfaces. If you cannot see where you are stepping, make multiple trips or use carts so you are not guessing you’re footing.
4. **Choose Footwear That Matches the Surface:** Worn or smooth soles reduce traction, especially on metal, painted, or wet stair surfaces. Shoes with good grip and proper support significantly reduce slip risk.

What to Do When You See a Hazard

- Stop and slow down before entering the area
- Avoid the hazard or use another route if possible
- Report wet steps, clutter, damaged treads, or loose handrails immediately
- Warn others nearby so they do not walk into the same danger

Paying attention, slowing down, and speaking up are the most effective ways to prevent serious falls on stairs and ramps.

Watch for Environmental Changes

Lighting, shadows, glare, weather, and cleaning activities can change stair and ramp conditions quickly. Do not assume conditions are the same as earlier in the day, even in familiar areas.

FINAL WORD

Stairways and ramps may feel routine, but they demand attention every time you use them. Slow down, stay alert, and speak up when something looks unsafe because one missed step can change everything.