

## Avoiding Slips, Trips, and Falls during Winter Months

**S**afety professionals suggest ways to walk to prevent slips and falls. Unfortunately, some of these methods contradict each other. You must decide which works best for you.

Russell C. Smith is Safety and Environmental director for Maine Public Service Co., a small electric utility in Northern Maine. He shares this tip for walking on slippery, icy surfaces.



“Shuffle your feet along in small steps and never let your feet lose contact with the ice (no heel/toe regular stepping),” suggests Smith. “It helps to keep your balance and it really does work. Try it

sometime on a hockey rink, and you will see and feel the difference. Of course, we do wear ice cleats in the wintertime up here too. The brand is Stabilizers, and of course, they are made in Maine!”

Jo Kane is a safety specialist with the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government in Lexington, KY. They employ 3,000 personnel, many of whom have to be out regardless of the weather such as drivers of the salt trucks and snow removal vehicles; police, fire, and detention personnel; sanitary sewer workers, garbage collectors, personnel who clean off government sidewalks, etc.

She also suggests pointing the feet outward and taking small steps, adding that the walker’s momentum is reduced if they do slip. “We call this the duck walk and practice it with new employees during orientation,” she adds.

John Hamshare, writing from England, admits that “we do not get the severe

weather you experience in the U.S., but I hope someone will find the tip useful.” He said his tip, which is exact opposite of the other two mentioned, has saved him “from many a slip when the ground has been icy and slippery underfoot.” He was told this tip many years ago, he says, and was led to believe it was an old Native American practice.

“When walking normally, the instinct is to point your toes outwards. If you do this on ice and slip, your feet tend to spread apart and you lose your stability,” John points out, adding, “This usually results in a fall, and possible injury. If, however, you point your toes inwards, it’s much easier to maintain your balance and remain upright. You may feel foolish doing it, but there’s no fun in lying on the cold ground with broken wrists, or any other injuries.”

Ken Tyler with M-Flex now hails from sunny Anaheim, CA, but says one of the problems he had to deal with in the past is slip and falls on icy surfaces. He says, “I searched around for a long time for a practical solution and finally found one -- on the golf course of all places. The sporting goods industry manufactures golf overshoes with short spikes for golfers who play on wet grassy surfaces. These rubber overshoes are great because they are made to fit over regular shoe ware and slip on and off with ease. I have had people using these on icy roofs, issued them to tow truck drivers, and to loading dock personnel who are required to walk on slippery loading docks. I highly recommend them to anyone who must work in icy conditions and need a better grip that normal shoes will allow.”