

Take Action. Get Traction! Beware of the Freeze/Thaw Cycle

The Problem

Freezing rain is one of the leading causes of serious slip and fall injuries during any winter season. However, local weather alerts usually give you advanced warning so that you can salt, sand or use one of the slip/fall prevention methods we've previously recommended to reduce the risk of injury. However, there is another type of weather event that is nearly as dangerous because the lack of warning can cause you to be caught off guard. We call it the freeze/thaw cycle.

What Happens

In this weather pattern, the temperature hovers right around freezing. The screenshot above is from a smartphone weather app during a freeze/thaw cycle. The temperature on most of the days shown was above freezing from mid-morning until early afternoon causing melted ice and snow to cover walking surfaces. The temperature dropped below freezing by mid-afternoon causing the meltwater to refreeze.

It's easy to be caught off guard with this type of weather pattern because you may have had plenty of traction on the walking surface when you went into work, your home, the grocery store or any other dwelling, but when you come out you don't realize it's all turned to ice – often in new spots – and down you go.

What to Do

Designate someone in your business – they can be from human resources, the safety department, a supervisor or facility services employee – to keep an eye out for this weather pattern.

Once recognized, some ideas to help increase awareness are:

- Place signs at your building's exits notifying people to "use caution as meltwater has refrozen."
- Send out an e-mail blast stating the same.
- Send a group text to mobile employees informing them of the conditions.
- If you have a sand shaker or ice cleat campaign in process, use these communication ideas to remind people to use the tools you've given them to prevent injury.

Stay alert and plan ahead for the freeze/thaw cycle to help reduce your exposure to slip/fall injuries.

