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Slips, Trips & Falls

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The presentation began with some startling facts:

Falls are the second largest cause of accidental death in the Northeast. In 2009 Center for Disease Control data on the Northeast, more people are killed in falls than in motor vehicle accidents.

Falls are the leading cause of nonfatal medically attended injuries in the United States

According to the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies “Falls have been the second leading cause of unintentional death in America since the early nineteenth century. One in three emergency room visits is for falls, and falls represent the most common cause of injuries and hospital admissions for trauma. Falls are also the number one reason children end up in hospital emergency rooms.”

So, what has this got to do with a home inspection? Lots!

From the Standards: The purpose of a Home Inspection for Residential Buildings, including their attached garages, is to provide the Client with an inspection Report that forthrightly discloses the physical conditions of the systems and components listed in 266 CMR 6.04 which are Readily Accessible and Observable, including those systems and components, which are **Safety Hazards as Observed at the time of the inspection**.

If you understand how to prevent slips, trips and falls, you can better advise your clients.

The most straightforward tip to remember is the *Theory of Expectation: When the walking conditions encountered are contrary to that of our expectation, the probability of an accident is increased.* When walking around the property interior and exterior keep this tip in mind. We all identify trip hazards, but maybe we didn’t realize that they are the main cause of trips to the hospital.

When inspecting stairs, we all know to look at riser heights and railings. Perhaps we should also include observations on the condition of the carpet and (surprisingly) if it has a busy print and the presence of railings on both sides of wide stairs. The International Building Code (IBC) says you need a railing if the walking surface is 30” above grade, or you don’t need a railing on stairs of less than 4 risers, but maybe that is doing a disservice to the residents of the Commonwealth. Most falls occur at the top three and bottom three stairs, logic tells us, short staircases are dangerous, and short stairways without handrails are especially dangerous.

After hearing William Marletta speak we know how preventable slips, trips and falls can be and it puts some of the home inspection in context. Like the safety features on a boiler or water heater, maybe we need to give special attention to stairs in the house. They aren’t as simple as we might have thought!