



Occupational Health & Safety Advisors

SEASONAL READINESS, SEPTEMBER 2026

When the Ground Changes.

September is when the workplace changes underfoot, and the worker stays the same.

Workers do not suddenly become careless in the fall. The workplace changes around them. The weather turns, and surfaces that were dry all summer are wet with rain, slick with leaves, and glazed by the first frost. The light changes, and the walk to the car that happened in daylight in August happens in the dark by late September. The pace changes, because everyone can feel winter coming, and the rush to finish the outdoor work, the repairs, and the deadlines before the snow flies is on. And the routine changes: summer ends, school starts, and mornings and evenings tighten around bus times, pickups, and practices.

Everything changes, before the worker does. That is what makes September dangerous. The person is the same. The ground is not.

"Everything changes, before the worker does."

Falls are the result. The serious fall from a ladder or a roof, rushed because winter is coming. And the ordinary fall on the same level, the slip on a wet floor or an icy step that every one of us has nearly taken. Both climb in the fall. Both are preventable. And both come down to the same thing: preparing the workplace for the season before the season changes it for you.

This summer we talked about investigating incidents well and anticipating injuries before they happen. September is the next step. Walk your workplace now, on a dry, bright day, and remove the hazards the season is about to create.

Read this newsletter. Complete the checklist. File it as a due diligence record. And before the ground changes under your people this autumn, walk it yourself.



What Changes in September



The footing: rain, wet leaves, morning dew, and the first frost turn dry surfaces slippery.



The light: shorter days mean walking, working, and driving in the dark at the ends of shifts.



The pace: the rush to finish outdoor work before winter tempts people to skip the setup.



The routine: school is back, and the drive to and from work now runs through school zones, stopped buses, and children at crossings.



Not Just Roofs and Ladders

It is easy to read a piece about falls and think it is meant for roofers and construction crews. It is not. Every workplace has a set of stairs, an entrance where the weather gets tracked in, a loading dock, a ramp, a cord run across a floor, and a parking lot that is dark and icy by October. Same-level falls, the slips and trips on the ground people cross every day, are among the most common injuries in any workplace, in any industry. The question is not whether your people climb. It is whether anywhere in your workplace the footing, the light, or the housekeeping gets worse when the season turns. If the answer is yes, this newsletter is about you.



THE FALL EVERYONE HAS NEARLY TAKEN

The Ground Changes.

The most common fall is the one on the level ground you walk every day.

Everyone has nearly taken it. The foot that slides on a wet tile at the entrance, the heel that catches the edge of a mat, the step off a curb onto a patch of ice that was not there yesterday. Same-level falls, the slips and trips on the ground people walk all day, do not look dangerous. That is exactly why they are the most common cause of lost-time injury in workplace after workplace, and why they are so easy to ignore until someone breaks a wrist, a hip, or worse.

In September and the weeks after, the odds get worse. Rain and wet leaves coat outdoor walkways. Morning dew and the first frost glaze steps and ramps before anyone has salted them. Weather gets tracked in through doorways, leaving floors slick right where people enter at speed. And the light drops, so the hazard is harder to see at the ends of shifts. None of it requires a worker to do anything wrong. The ground simply changes under them.

And it changes at the busiest time of the year. Everyone can feel winter coming, so the outdoor work, the repairs, the shutdowns, the shipping, and the end-of-quarter push all speed up at once. Urgency is the quiet driver of falls. A person carrying too much, moving too fast, on footing that is worse than it looks, is the recipe for a fall, whether it is a slip in a doorway or a step off a ladder.

What the Law Requires

The law does not treat a slippery floor as bad luck. Under the general duty in every provincial OHS Act, the employer has a duty to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from a foreseeable hazard, and a walkway that ices over every autumn is entirely foreseeable. The rules go further for the surfaces people walk on: exterior stairs, walkways, and ramps must be kept free of ice, snow, and other slipping and tripping hazards, and workplaces must be kept clean and clear so people are not hurt on the ground they cross to do their jobs.



The Law, Where You Work



General duty: every Canadian OHS statute requires the employer to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from foreseeable hazards. In Ontario that is the Occupational Health and Safety Act, section 25(2)(h).



Falls from height: Ontario's Construction Projects Regulation, O. Reg. 213/91, requires fall protection where a worker may fall three metres or more, and Working at Heights training under O. Reg. 297/13. British Columbia's Occupational Health and Safety Regulation requires fall protection at three metres, or at any height where a fall could cause serious injury. Alberta's OHS Code requires the same at three metres.



Slips and trips: federally, the Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations require exterior stairways, walkways, and ramps to be kept free of ice, snow, and other slipping and tripping hazards, and every province carries the same duty to keep walking surfaces safe.



National best practice: the CSA Z259 series of fall-protection standards, and the resources of the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.



The Footing Gets Worse Before Anyone Notices

By the time someone falls, the warning signs have usually been there for weeks.

- Leaves left to build up and go slick on outdoor paths and steps.
- A drain that no longer clears, so water pools and then freezes.
- Entrance mats that are worn, curled, or missing where the weather comes in.
- A burned-out light over a stairwell or at the edge of the lot.
- Salt and grit still in storage on the morning of the first frost.

None of these is dramatic. Every one of them is a fall waiting for the weather.

"None of it requires a worker to do anything wrong. The ground simply changes under them."



THE SERIOUS FALL, SHOW ME THE FINES

The Fall Everyone Fears.

The fall from a ladder or a roof, rushed because winter is coming.

The other fall is the one everyone pictures when they hear the word: the fall from a ladder, a roof, a scaffold, a loading dock. It is far less common than the slip on the level, but when it happens, it is far more likely to be fatal. And the autumn rush is written all over these cases. The outdoor job has to be finished before the snow, the light is short, the weather is closing in, and the fall protection that would have saved a life is sitting in the truck, unused, because putting it on would have taken a few more minutes.

That last detail is the one that repeats. In case after case, the equipment was there. The training was required. The rule was known. And under the pressure to get the roof done before the weather turned, someone climbed without it. A fall from height is usually not a story about a missing guardrail. It is a story about a guardrail, a harness, or a lesson that existed and was skipped.

Show Me The Fines

Three cases. Three provinces. The protection was there.

Toronto, Ontario. Fatal fall, fined 2025

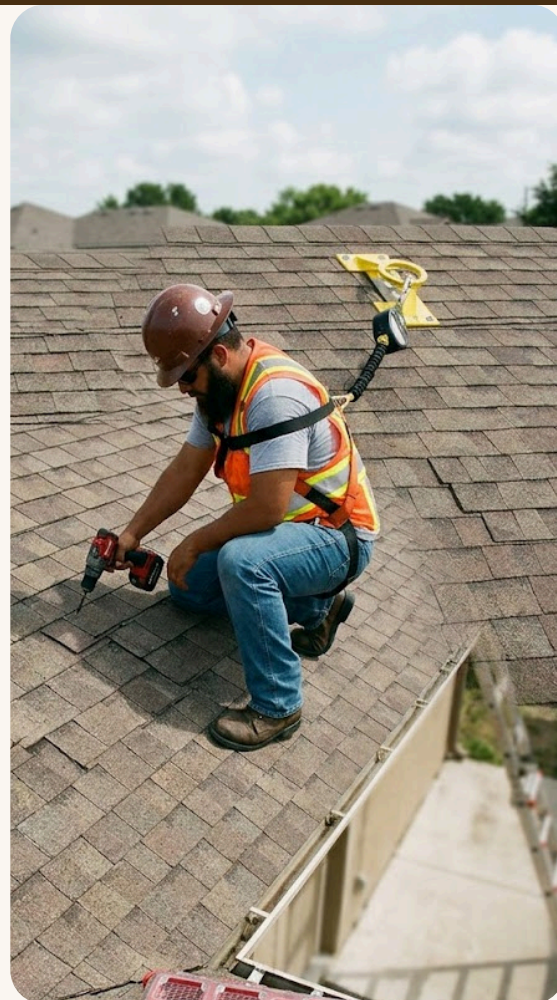
A worker on a home renovation was helping install windows and siding. Standing on a veranda roof about three and a half metres up, they climbed a ladder toward the main roof to hand their supervisor a tool, fell backward, and died. The worker had never completed the mandatory Working at Heights training, and neither the worker nor the supervisor was wearing fall protection, though the equipment was sitting in the company truck onsite. The company was fined **\$80,000**. A ladder, a tool, and a few metres, and the two things that would have changed the outcome, the training and the harness, were both available and both skipped.

Norwich, Ontario. Fatal fall, fined 2026.

A worker was installing strapping across the roof trusses of a barn under construction, about thirty feet above the ground, when they fell through the framing and died. The worker was not using any fall protection, even though the equipment was available on the site. The company had not assigned a supervisor and had held no formal safety talks, and although it had a written policy, it had put no fall protection procedures in place. The company was fined **\$60,000**. The gap between having a policy and using one is exactly where this worker fell.

Calgary, Alberta. Serious injury, convicted 2025.

A worker set an unsecured portable ladder next to an uncovered opening in the floor. The ladder slipped and toppled, and the worker fell through the opening into the basement below, suffering serious, life-altering injuries. Two basic controls were missing at once: the ladder was not secured, and the opening was not covered. The employer was fined **\$168,000** for failing to protect the worker, and the site's prime contractor a further **\$168,000** for having no system in place to catch either failure. Two ordinary hazards, nobody responsible for checking, and a worker who will carry it for the rest of their life.



This is not rare, and regulators are watching. In British Columbia alone, workers filed more than **22,000** fall-from-height claims over five years, including thousands of serious injuries and dozens of deaths, and in a single recent year WorkSafeBC issued **152** penalties, worth over **one million dollars**, to employers for inadequate fall protection.

Falls from height are among the most enforced hazards in the country. Falls on the level are among the most common injuries in it. September raises the odds of both.

"A fall from height is usually not a missing guardrail. It is a guardrail that was there and skipped."

DUE DILIGENCE RECORD, WALK IT, SIGN IT, FILE IT

September Readiness Checklist: Falls and the Turning Season

Walk your site before the weather turns. Sign it. Date it. File it.

A Section A: The Ground Underfoot

- ☐ Are outdoor walkways, steps, and ramps on a schedule for clearing leaves, water, ice, and snow as the weather turns?
- ☐ Are mats placed at every entrance where weather gets tracked in, and kept flat, clean, and dry?
- ☐ Has the lighting on walkways, stairs, entrances, and parking areas been checked before the darker months?
- ☐ Is drainage cleared so water does not pool and freeze on the paths people use?
- ☐ Are wet floors and slippery spots cleaned up or marked promptly, especially where people move from outside to inside?

B Section B: Working At Height

- ☐ Is fall protection required, available, and actually used wherever a worker could fall about three metres or more, or a shorter distance onto a hazard?
- ☐ Have the workers who work at height completed the training their jurisdiction requires?
- ☐ Are ladders inspected, in good repair, secured against movement, and set on firm, level footing?
- ☐ Are floor and roof openings covered or guarded, and open edges protected?
- ☐ Is someone responsible for confirming fall protection is in place before the work starts, not after?

C Section C: Preparing for the Season

- ☐ Has a walk of the whole site been done to find the hazards the changing weather and shorter light will create?
- ☐ Is the pressure to finish outdoor work before winter being managed so crews are not rushed into shortcuts?
- ☐ For workers who drive or run a fleet, have they been reminded that school is back, with active school zones, stopped buses, and children at crossings?
- ☐ Are seasonal controls, salt and grit, lighting, mats, and clearing schedules, in place before they are needed rather than after the first storm?
- ☐ Has this review been documented, signed, and filed as a due diligence record?

Completed By: _____

Date: _____

Title: _____

Location: _____



DUE DILIGENCE RECORD, WALK THE SITE BEFORE THE SEASON TURNS

Your September Action Plan

Walk the site before the season turns it against you.

1. Walk your whole site, inside and out, and look at it as autumn will leave it. The entrance where rain gets tracked in, the steps and ramps that will ice over, the dark corner of the parking lot, the ladder someone will grab to clear a gutter. Mark the hazards the season is about to create.
2. Fix the footing before the weather does. Set a clearing and salting schedule now, put mats at the weather doors, clear the drains, and check every light on a walkway or stairway before the dark months arrive.
3. Deal with the height work before the rush. Inventory and inspect the ladders and the fall protection, confirm the people doing roof, gutter, and dock work are trained, and make using the protection the rule, not the thing that gets skipped to save ten minutes.
4. Manage the deadline, not just the work. The push to beat winter is real, but a rushed crew is a falling crew. Build the time in, and make clear that finishing safely beats finishing fast.
5. Remember the roads changed too. If your people drive or run a fleet, school is back in. Remind them that school zones are active again, that buses stop with their lights out, and that children appear at crossings, on the same darker morning and evening drives.

Falls are almost never a single reckless act. They are the season changing faster than the workplace did. The frost arrives before the salt does. The dark arrives before the lights are checked. The deadline arrives before the ladder is inspected. Each gap is small. Together, over a few autumn weeks, they are how an ordinary walk across a yard or a climb up a ladder becomes the day someone does not go home whole.

The calendar is one of the few hazards that always gives you notice. You already know the weather will turn. You already know the days will shorten. You already know the rush to finish before winter is coming. Few hazards announce themselves so honestly, which means every one of these falls can be prepared for, on a dry, bright day in September, before the season forces the issue. The safest workplaces do not react to autumn. They prepare for it before autumn arrives.

Before you put this newsletter down, answer one question. Somewhere in your workplace, is there a surface, a stairway, an entrance, a ladder, or a stretch of ground that gets more dangerous the moment the weather turns, and has nothing yet been done about it? If you are not certain, that uncertainty is your answer. Go and walk it.

So walk your site this month, while the weather still gives you the choice. Find the places the season is about to change, and for each one ask the question this whole newsletter is built around: what will be different here in a month, and what have we done today so the worker who crosses it then still gets home?

Complete the checklist. Sign it. Date it. File it. That walk, documented, is what keeps your people upright and your business protected.



OMHAS Programs & Trainings

As your health and safety adviser, OMHAS maintains a complete library of health and safety programs, and every one of our maintenance clients has access to all of them. Three speak to this month: Fall Protection (OHS-PROG-22) for the work at height, Ladder Safety (OHS-PROG-18), pointed here since two of the three cases in this issue began on a ladder, and Workplace Inspections (OHS-PROG-09), the tool for the seasonal site walk that catches slips, trips, and footing hazards before the weather does.

We also run certification e-courses your crew can complete, and September, before the hazards show, is the right time to run them. The Slips, Trips and Falls course speaks straight to this issue, the Ladder Safety course to the fall that starts on a rung, and the Accident, Incident and Near-Miss Investigation course prepares you for the day something does happen. Each one certifies the worker and puts a dated, documented record in your due diligence file.

All of it, the programs and the training, is yours for the asking. The one thing we cannot do from the outside is see the need in your workplace for you. That part is yours. If you read this and recognize a hazard the season is about to create, reach out, and we will put it in your hands.



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