



General Guidelines for Fall Investigation

1. When investigating a fall or an alleged fall, the goal is to determine what conditions existed and what the area of the event looked like at the time the event occurred.
 - a. It is critical to know specifically where the event occurred.
 - b. If you have not witnessed the event or discovered the event, try to obtain as much information as possible from the person who reported it so that you can go to the correct area.
 - c. If possible, have a person who witnessed the event or discovered the event take you to the area.
2. Be prepared when you go to investigate, especially if a non-resident is involved:
 - a. Bring a pad and pen to record notes.
 - b. Bring a camera (digital if possible).
3. When arriving at the scene, obtain as much information as possible regarding when the event occurred so that you can determine how much time elapsed from the time of the event until the time of the investigation. This is critical in assessing what conditions, if any, have changed since the event occurred (i.e., lighting conditions, whether the area was cleaned up, weather conditions, etc)
4. Obtain the injured/affected person's version of the event if possible:
 - a. Interview him/her; ask what happened and if he/she knows how it happened.
 - b. Do not suggest answers or lead person during interview.
5. Interview any witnesses and determine if they actually witnessed the event or arrived after it occurred:
 - a. Question witnesses on whether they know how the event occurred.
 - b. Determine if witness statements are factual or if they are based on subjective opinions. Watch out for phrases such as "I think that..." "I guess that..." "I suppose that ..." or "I bet that..."
6. Investigate the area and look for the following types of things:
 - a. What are the lighting conditions? Were they the same when the event occurred?
 - b. If it is dusk, dawn or night, is the artificial lighting adequate? Is the area well lit?
 - c. Are all the lights on?
 - d. Were they on at the time of the event?
 - e. Are all the bulbs lit or are some out?
7. Be aware of where the event occurred:
 - a. Did the event occur in an area that people are expected to walk in?
 - b. Did it occur on a pathway, driveway or in a parking lot?
 - c. Did the injured/affected person walk across an area he/she was not expected to or not supposed to walk on? Did he/she take a shortcut?



8. What are the weather conditions:
 - a. Was it snowing at the time of the event?
 - b. If it was, but had stopped, how long before the event did it stop snowing?
 - c. Was the area plowed, salted, or sanded?
 - d. Is there any evidence that area where event occurred was recently plowed, sanded, or salted?
 - e. Was it raining at the time of the event?
 - f. If it was raining, investigate whether the injured person may have been running or walking quickly to get out of the rain.
 - g. If the event occurred inside, was it near a doorway?
 - h. If so, were mat(s) down?
 - i. How big is the mat?
 - j. Is the mat wet?
 - k. Is there any wetness outside of the mat area?
9. If you observe, suspect or the injured/affected person alleges that he/she slipped or tripped on the floor:
 - a. Carefully inspect the floor and determine if you find any areas of wetness, slipperiness, stickiness, or any other defect, such as a bump in the carpet
 - b. If no such evidence is found, be sure that you indicate you inspected the area and document that nothing unusual was found.
 - c. If you find wetness/stickiness, how big is the area? (Use a measuring tape if possible and determine the dimensions). How wide, long, and deep is it?
 - d. What is the slippery/sticky substance? Touch it and smell it if you can.
 - e. Is the wetness something obvious or is it something that is difficult to see?
 - f. Investigate to determine how long the condition existed.
 - g. Is the wet area dirty and smeared?
 - h. Does it look like wetness/stickiness was there a while?
 - i. Are there dirty footprints through the wet/sticky area or is it clean and clear?
 - j. Interview employees who work in the general vicinity to determine if they saw the condition, and if so, when and if it was reported or if someone attempted to clean it up
10. Inspect to determine if there were any efforts by the facility to address the situation:
 - a. Are there any "Wet Floor" signs or cones in the area?
 - b. When were they put out, before or after the event?
 - c. Was anyone from maintenance/housekeeping departments notified? If so, when and what was their response to the situation?
11. Interview employees and others in the area to determine if anyone complained about the condition or the area before the event:
 - a. If so, who complained, what did they complain about, how many complaints were there, when were the complaints, and was anything done by employees in response to the complaints?
 - b. Are the prior complaints documented?
 - c. Have others complained about the condition on prior occasions?
 - d. Was this a problem whenever it rained or snowed?
 - e. Is there a leak?
 - f. Was anything done in the past to correct it?



- g. Does anyone know how the slippery condition got there or how long it was there before the event?
- 12. Observe the injured/affected person's clothing if possible:
 - a. Is the clothing wet?
 - b. If so, where is it wet and how wet is it?
- 13. Always ask the injured/affected person when he/she first saw the condition that he/she states caused the fall:
 - a. Was it before or after they fell?
- 14. Observe the injured/affected person's footwear:
 - a. Is the footwear appropriate for the weather conditions?
 - b. Are the heels high?
 - c. Do the shoes appear to be worn out?
 - d. Do the shoes/soles appear to be slippery?
- 15. Is the injured/affected person wearing corrective lenses:
 - a. Was he/she wearing glasses at the time of the event? If not, was he/she supposed to be wearing glasses? If so, are the glasses required for daily wear? Are the glasses for reading?
 - b. Does he/she wear contact lenses? Were the contact lenses in at the time of event?
- 16. Is the injured person using an assistive device:
 - a. If so, was he/she using such a device at the time of event?
 - b. If not, was he/she supposed to be using such a device at the time of the event?
 - c. If the injured/affected person is a resident, check the resident's record to see if he/she was recommended to use such a device and document it he/she was supposed to, but wasn't using it at the time.
- 17. If it is claimed that the injured/affected person slipped and fell over a defect in the walkway or a pothole in the parking lot, go through a similar procedure in inspecting and investigating the area. In these types of situations, it is very important to have the injured/affected person, or a witness show you exactly where he/she claims to have fallen, if at all possible. Do not go out in the parking lot to find a pothole, and then assume that "this must be where the person fell."
- 18. Measure any such defect with a tape measure for its dimensions: length, width, and depth. Take photographs of the area.
- 19. Interview employees as needed, and follow your leads:
 - a. If you learn there were prior complaints on previous occasions about the same or similar condition, contact facilities management/maintenance to see what, if anything, they were doing in response.
 - b. Did they make prior repairs?
 - c. Are the parts on order?
 - d. Were they told it was not in the budget to correct the problem?
 - e. Were they waiting for some reason to correct the problem? If so, what was the reason?
- 20. Remember the difference between an alleged fall and an assumed fall:
 - a. If the only evidence that the event occurred is the injured person's own statement, with no objective or circumstantial evidence to support it, it is an ALLEGED FALL.
 - b. There must be some objective, fact-based evidence to back up the person's statement if you are to put that the fall is ASSUMED.



- c. If you are unsure, indicate in the report that the fall is ALLEGED.
- 21. Remember to document your findings at the time of the investigation in the Event report:
 - a. Any subsequent investigation performed should also be entered as a Follow-up Action and is confidential information.
 - b. If the investigator is not a File Manager, all investigation documentation should be entered as a Follow-up Action with details of who did the investigation and when it occurred.
- 22. Before closing file, review the following recommendations and document in Follow-up Action→Work Done on File, as indicated:
 - a. Ascertain whether employee in-servicing is beneficial or necessary, and if so, conduct in-servicing.
 - b. Ascertain whether any policy/procedure changes need to be made; if so, make such changes or additions.
 - c. Ensure that the event was reported to the appropriate government agency, if necessary.
 - d. Ensure that the event was reported to the insurance carrier, if necessary.
 - e. Ensure that all corrective actions and contributing factors are documented.
 - f. Ensure that any repairs that were recommended have been made and are documented in the file.
 - g. Ensure you have documented at least one intervention to prevent a reoccurrence.
- 23. Risk Manager should summarize findings and corrective actions in Resolution/Outcome section under Risk Manager Review prior to closing file.
- 24. File closure can take place once the established sign-off procedure, based on facility policy, is completed, Risk Manager has completed his/her Risk Manager Review, and Follow-up Actions are documented in Event file.
 - 1. A File Manager with Closure may close the file if the following conditions apply [include if organization allows file managers to close events; remove if not permitted]:
 - a. Level of Severity is 0-2.
 - b. Risk Manager has signed off under Follow-up Action→Sign-off.
- 25. General file closure guidelines are as follows:
 - a. Severity 0-2, no longer than 2 weeks [or modify as appropriate; in no event should this be longer than 4 weeks]
 - b. Severity 3 and above, no longer than 4 weeks [or modify as appropriate; in no event should this be longer than 6 weeks unless there is still ongoing activity on the file].

Note: Event files are available for review after closure and are easily found/recoverable in RL6. Do not delay closure due to concern that the event will no longer be accessible.