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BLOGS

Archives; Workplace Policies

Cellphones and Accidents The Connection Should be Obvious

Okay, I couldn't resist the headline. The Star-Tribune recently ran an article with the headline: "[Pedestrians distracted by electronic devices stumble into danger, raising safety concerns](#)." As a lifelong klutz, I just had to read the article. Sure enough, statistics show a rise in the number of injuries sustained by those walking while using a cellphone or other electronic device. People are running into telephone poles, falling off subway platforms, falling into ditches, falling off curbs, and being clipped by cars while focusing on their electronic devices. Some of the stories are funny, like the one about a woman who fell into a large fountain at a mall while she was texting. She wasn't injured. Some stories, however, are about serious injuries, and some people have died.

We have heard a lot about the problems related to the use of cellphones while driving. As a result, we know that employers can face liability when damage or injury results from an employee's cellphone use while driving on company business. Many companies have policies prohibiting or limiting such use. In addition, several states and the federal government have [enacted laws](#) limiting the use of cellphones while driving.

While that may be old news, I'm not so sure that we have thought enough about the need for policies and procedures limiting the use of cellphones at other times. Should employers restrict their use on production floors and in hallways or stairwells? Should cellphones be banned around heavy machinery? In parking lots? I know we cannot warn about every potential threat (after all, there will always be a few klutzes like me out there), but policies which discourage the use of electronic devices in certain settings may help to prevent accidents and injuries and may decrease an employer's potential liability for those injuries.