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**PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release**

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**Gardening Safety Tips for Seniors**

TWIN FALLS-Spring is here, and many seniors are eager to get outside working in the yard. It's a great way to get moving after being indoors all winter long. It's also important to take precautions to prevent falls before venturing into the garden.

Falls are the leading cause of accidental injury deaths among Idahoans 65 and older, with Idaho EMS responding to more than 5,500 fall-related calls for that age group in 2010.

“Many older adults recognize winter as a dangerous time of year, associating falls with icy sidewalks and parking lots,” says Elvia Caldera, Health Education Specialist at South Central Public Health District (SCPHD). “But spring can pose risks, too, especially for seniors who have spent an inactive winter inside. We encourage seniors to stay active as an important way to stay healthy. But we also encourage seniors to take precautions when working in the yard.”

Barbara Osborne participates in the Fit and Fall Proof™ classes in Twin Falls, and she has started working in her garden and feels that the exercise classes have helped her. “Movement is easier with the regular exercises I do and assists me in my gardening. I have osteoporosis so it is important to keep my bones strong. It has been nice to attend the classes because I am new to the area and it is a great way to meet people with similar interests.”

Participating in the free local Fit and Fall Proof™ classes can help prepare older adults for the physical activity of yard work by improving mobility, balance, and strength. In addition, older adults should consider taking the following precautions to make yard work a safe activity:

- Take a few minutes to stretch or warm up before beginning digging, weeding, or pushing the wheelbarrow.
- Don't risk dehydration. Keep water close at hand while working outdoors.
- Use sunscreen and/or wear a hat and pause for shade breaks.
- Install raised beds which require less bending and stooping.

- Invest in equipment: a portable stool, foam pads, long-handled tools with good grip surfaces.
- Keep in mind the time-honored adage, “Take time to smell the flowers” – and get help from someone else for heavy-lifting chores like adding large bags of soil or compost to garden beds.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an older adult is treated in a hospital emergency room for a fall every 18 seconds, and every 35 minutes an older adult dies as a result of a fall-related injury. In Idaho, there is an average of 113 fall-related deaths among seniors each year. Taking precautions in the garden – and taking part in Fit and Fall Proof™ classes – can reduce that number and improve the quality of life for many seniors.

SCPHD will also be hosting a Fit and Fall Proof™ Class Leader Training on June 1, 2012. For more information about the training, call SCPHD at 737-5988.

For a list of classes and more tips on preventing falls, visit [www.phd5.idaho.gov](http://www.phd5.idaho.gov) or call Elvia Caldera at 737-5988.