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Winter Weather Plan. Equip. Train.

eSource Newsletter

Preparedness

Outdoor work requires proper preparation, especially in severe winter weather conditions. Although OSHA does not have a specific standard that covers working in cold environments, employers have a responsibility to provide workers with employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards, including winter weather related hazards, which are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to them (Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970). Employers should, therefore, train workers on the hazards of the job and safety measures to use, such as engineering controls and safe work practices, that will protect workers' safety and health.

Employers Should:

- Train Workers
- Provide Engineering Controls
- Implement Safe Work Practices
- Consider Protective Clothing that provides warmth.

Employers Should Train Workers

At a minimum train workers on:

Cold Stress:

- * How to recognize the symptoms of cold stress, prevent cold stress injuries and illnesses
- * The importance of self-monitoring and monitoring coworkers for symptoms
- * First aid and how to call for additional medical assistance in an emergency
- * How to select proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions

Other winter weather related hazards that workers may be exposed to, for example, slippery roads and surfaces, windy conditions, and downed power lines

- * How to recognize these hazards
- * How workers will be protected: engineering controls, safe work practices and proper selection of equipment, including personal protective equipment.



Employers Should Provide Engineering Controls

Engineering controls can be effective in reducing the risk of cold stress. For example, radiant heaters may be used to warm workplaces like outdoor security stations. If possible, employers should shield work areas from drafts or wind to reduce wind chill.

Employers should use engineering controls to protect workers from other winter weather related hazards, for example, aerial lifts or ladders can be used for safely applying de-icing materials to roofs, to protect workers from the hazard of falling through skylights.

Employers Should Implement Safe Work Practices

Safe work practices that employers can implement to protect workers from injuries, illnesses and fatalities include:

- Providing workers with the proper tools and equipment to do their jobs
- Developing work plans that identify potential hazards and the safety measures that will be used to protect workers
- Scheduling maintenance and repair jobs for warmer months
- Scheduling jobs that expose workers to the cold weather in the warmer part of the day
- Avoiding exposure to extremely cold temperatures when possible
- Limiting the amount of time spent outdoors on extremely cold days
- Using relief workers to assign extra workers for long, demanding jobs
- Providing warm areas for use during break periods
- Providing warm liquids (no alcohol) to workers
- Monitoring workers who are at risk of cold stress
- Monitoring the weather conditions during a winter storm, having a reliable means of communicating with workers and being able to stop work or evacuate when necessary.
- Acclimatizing new workers and those returning after time away from work by gradually increasing their workload, and allowing more frequent breaks in warm areas, as they build up a tolerance for working in the cold environment.

- Having a means of communicating with workers, especially in remote areas
- Knowing how the community warns the public about severe weather: outdoor sirens, radio, and television.

Employers Should Consider Protective Clothing that Provides Warmth

Employers must provide personal protective equipment (PPE), for example, fall protection, when required by OSHA standards to protect workers' safety, and health. However, in limited cases specified in the standard (29 CFR 1910.132), there are exceptions to the requirement for employers to provide PPE to workers. For instance, there is no OSHA requirement for employers to provide workers with *ordinary* clothing, skin creams, or other items, used solely for protection from weather, such as winter coats, jackets, gloves, parkas, rubber boots, hats, raincoats, ordinary sunglasses, and sunscreen (29 CFR 1910.132(h)(4)). Regardless of this, many employers provide their workers with winter weather gear such as winter coats/jackets and gloves.

Learn more about PPE requirements and how to design an effective PPE program: Personal Protective Equipment (OSHA Safety and Health Topics Page).

Dressing Properly for the Cold

Dressing properly is extremely important to preventing cold stress. When cold environments or temperatures cannot be avoided, the following would help protect workers from cold stress:

- Wear at least three layers of loose fitting clothing. Layering provides better insulation.
- Thermal wear, wool, silk or polypropylene, inner layers of clothing that will hold more body heat than cotton.
- A middle layer of wool or synthetic to provide insulation even when wet.
- An outer wind and rain protection layer that allows some ventilation to prevent overheating.
- Knit mask to cover face and mouth (if needed)
- Hat that will cover your ears as well. A hat will help keep your whole body warmer. Hats reduce the amount of body heat that escapes from your head.

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