

Lifesaving Tips for Cold Weather Work

Whether employees are working indoors or outdoors, they need to be aware of the hazards of exposure to heat and cold, how to guard against problems and how to recognize the symptoms of distress. Individual tolerance to temperature extremes vary, but without adequate precautions, anyone can become ill, sometimes with serious—even fatal—results, from failure to recognize these hazards.

As an employer, your responsibility is to see to it that normal working conditions do not put your employees' health at risk. But from time to time, conditions are less than ideal—for example, doing outdoor emergency repair work in bad weather; working in confined spaces, high-heat areas; working in a food cold-storage area or freezer; and so on. If you cannot change the conditions, your next defense is to inform workers how to protect themselves from temperatures that can be uncomfortable or dangerous.

As with most safety and health training, the key points to bring out are hazard recognition, hazard protection and procedures to follow in case of exposure.

The points Safety Management Checklists recommends you cover include:

Prevent problems:

- Limit exposure to cold, especially if weather is windy or humid.
- Be especially careful if you're elderly, overweight, have allergies, or poor circulation.
- Be especially careful if you smoke, drink, or take medications.
- Be aware that problems can arise even in above-freezing temperatures.
- Be aware that problems can arise from touching a subfreezing object.
- Don't bathe, smoke, or drink alcohol before going into the cold.

Wear layers of loose, dry clothing:

- Wear cotton or wool under layers.
- Wear a waterproof top layer.
- Be sure to cover head, hands, feet, and face.
- Dry or change wet clothing immediately.
- Keep moving in the cold.
- Take regular breaks in heated areas.
- Move to a warm area if you feel very cold or numb.
- Drink a warm nonalcoholic, decaffeinated beverage.

Know symptoms of frostbite:

- Feeling uncomfortably cold
- Feeling numb
- Feeling tingling, aching, or brief pain

- Skin color changing from white to grayish yellow to reddish violet to black
- Skin blisters
- Unconsciousness

Act quickly if frostbite strikes:

- Get medical attention.
- Don't rub body part or apply heat lamp or hot water bottles.
- Don't go near a hot stove.
- Don't break blisters.
- Warm frozen body part quickly with sheets or blankets or warm (not hot) water.
- Exercise warmed body part (don't walk on feet, though).
- Elevate frozen body part and cover with sterile cloths before moving.

Know symptoms of hypothermia:

- Feeling cold
- Pain in extremities
- Shivering
- Numbness and/or stiffness
- Poor coordination
- Drowsiness
- Slow or irregular breathing or heart rate
- Slurred speech
- Cool skin
- Puffy face
- Disorientation
- Apathy

Act quickly if hypothermia strikes:

- Call for medical help.
- Give victim artificial respiration, if needed.
- Move victim into warm area.
- Get victim out of frozen, wet, or tight clothing.
- Bundle victim in warm clothes or blankets.
- Have victim drink something warm (no caffeine or alcohol).

Source: BLR's Safety Daily Advisor