

When Working in the Cold, Be Prepared and Be Aware



Some cold weather dangers are obvious, but others are harder to see. When you must work in the cold, always be prepared and be aware.

When workers do jobs in the cold, there are many risks. Some cold weather dangers are obvious, but others are harder to see. Sometimes you might not even think it's very cold, but a cold-related illness or injury can still harm you.

When you must work in the cold, always be **prepared and be aware**.

Be Prepared

Workers who must be in the cold should wear warm clothing that is right for the weather. Wear several layers of loose clothing. Layering provides better insulation.

Wear gloves to protect the hands, and a hat and/or hood to protect the head. In wet conditions, wear waterproof shoes that have good traction. Make sure that your cold weather gear does not restrict your movement or block your eyesight.



Be prepared by wearing warm clothing.



Be aware that cold temperatures can lead to illness and injury.

Be prepared for working in the cold, even if the cold temperatures are not extreme. It's obvious that bitter cold and howling winds can harm you, but did you know that you could suffer cold-related illness and injuries when it is as warm as 60° F?

Be Aware

Hypothermia

One of the biggest dangers from working in the cold can be the hardest to recognize. [Hypothermia](#) happens when your body temperature drops below 95° F. Mild hypothermia can make you feel confused, and you may not realize anything is wrong until it is too late. Being too cold can also cloud your judgment and cause you to make mistakes while you work, and mistakes can sometimes be deadly.

Early symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, feeling tired, loss of coordination, and confusion. As

your body loses more heat, the shivering will stop, your skin may turn blue, the pupils of your eye will dilate, your pulse and breathing will slow, and you will lose consciousness.

You can avoid becoming too cold by wearing appropriate clothing for the cold weather.

For more information about hypothermia and other cold weather injuries, see the [NIOSH Fast Facts card, Protecting Yourself from Cold Stress\[PDF - 576KB\]](#).

Frostbite

Many parts of the body are prone to [frostbite](#), including your fingers, toes, nose, and ears. Frostbite happens when a part of the body freezes, and damaging the tissue. If the tissue can't be saved, the body part may need to be removed to prevent even worse health problems. Warning signs of frostbite include numbness or tingling, stinging, or pain on or near the affected body part. Avoid frostbite by being aware of the weather and wearing protective clothing such as warm gloves, insulated shoes, and warm hats. The colder it is, the faster frostbite can set in, so you shouldn't stay in the cold any longer than you needed.

Other Cold Weather Injuries

You can get [trench foot](#) when your feet are wet and cold for too long. Moisture causes your feet to lose heat, and this can slow the blood flow and damage tissue. Trench foot can happen when it is as warm as 60° F.

Sometimes cold weather can damage your skin and cause [chilblains](#). This problem can cause broken skin, swelling, blisters, redness, and itching. It can also happen when it is as warm as 60° F.

Be Ready for the Cold

If you have to work in the cold, always wear clothing that is appropriate for the weather. Remember prolonged exposures to cold temperatures could cause you to make poor decisions or react more slowly than normal. Tell your supervisor if you are not dressed warmly enough. Pay attention to warning signs and symptoms of hypothermia, frostbite, and other cold-related illnesses and injuries.



Kick Start Your Safety Culture: Improvements You Can Start Today!

If you find yourself in a perpetual cycle of “kick starting”, “restarting”, or “refocusing” on safety, you may have a problem. You have to keep safety in front of all members of your organization with a strong and consistent effort if you want to see results. Start by making these simple, low-cost changes now to begin seeing results in your safety records and performance.

Management Commitment: Safety professionals know this is critical to safety. A strong safety culture relies mostly on behavior at the base of your company, your labor force and hourly staffs typically have the largest impact on your company's safety record and workers' compensation performance, but this culture must be driven from the top down. If your organization doesn't have support from that individual, frankly, you are doomed to struggle with poor safety records and high claim frequency. You also need the next layer of the onion to buy-in to safety as well, meaning your senior managers or department heads. If you aren't the Owner/President/CEO of your organization, you have some work to do. Influencing those above you to change their priorities isn't easy but it absolutely can be done. Work with your Risk Managers at Meadowbrook for help on how to push this change with those key stakeholders. Write out your commitment and have all senior management signs the document. Incorporate this into your company policy books and review it with new employees. Post this document in conspicuous areas, some companies will even hang an oversized print of this document from the rafters as a constant reminder to staff saying “Safety is important here”.

Great, now you have the commitment in words, **next let's drive some actions**. Start by adding a safety conversation to every meeting. Do you have a board of directors meeting next quarter? Put a review of your organizations safety in the agenda. Are you having a production meeting at the start of this month? Have that manager talk about recent safety incidents and how

employees can help avoid another injury like that. Every time you talk to a group about business goals like production, sales or other performance indicators, add safety to that talk in an official way. You can take it a step further and insist that safety is actually the first item on the docket to really emphasize its importance. This should also trickle down to every pre-shift meeting, which is our next step.

Kickoff, pre-shift, morning meetings are often a critical part of many organizations. It is a way to get your staff motivated and focused on that day's important work and deliverables. The best companies in the world use these meetings to rally the efforts of their employees and bring a sense of teamwork to your staff. As noted in our last step, safety should be a topic in this meeting as well; sometimes it may be the only topic. It is an opportunity to ensure that everyone knows what they are walking into that day and to get their head on straight and be ready. Your daily work may not be as intense as rigging an oil well platform, but you can still touch briefly on safety so people are at least thinking about it for that moment. If you don't bring it into their sights for the day, can you feel confident they will bring it themselves?

These three basics are a great start.

To formalize your efforts a bit more, you should have a safety committee. Safety committees are required in many state's workers' compensation commissions and also by many insurance programs. A good safety committee should be composed of a cross functional representation within your company. Many companies have intricate organizational structures and you must evaluate how to manage a committee effectively within that landscape.

Most companies in our group can work with one committee. Your Owner/President/CEO should be on this committee and attend more meetings than not. A high level operations manager can also add some horsepower to a group like this. Include other key members based on their function and have all levels within the organization represented to ensure that many different perspectives are brought to each meeting. Don't forget the value of bringing in new blood on an annual or bi-annual basis.

Another important step is to track and investigate your accidents. Most organizations at least track their incidents, but the key to success is to formally investigate and create meaningful improvements in the form of corrective action. Learning from these incidents to prevent them and others like them from happening again is the only silver lining for a workplace injury. **The best companies go beyond this and apply the same process to near-miss incidents.** Empowering

your employees to report near-miss incidents can help you act even more pro-active in your safety program. At a recent safety committee meeting a client was discussing an employee injury that resulted from a common process and a tool that sprang free while in use and struck the young man in the face causing a very bloody injury. An inch higher and the man's eye may have been lost. During this meeting a manager described the incident, noting off-handedly that "it has happened before". If this particular company had addressed any number of these near-misses, this accident may have been prevented.

These relatively simple and cost-effective measures will make a dramatic impact on your work towards a safety culture.

By taking steps like those outlined here, you can expect to improve your organization's safety record and reduce your claim costs and the effect they have on premium and your bottom line.



SAFETY TIPS TO PREVENT WINTER SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

Safe winter walking can be done, if you follow a few common-sense safety tips.

PREVENTION TIPS:

- Wear winter footwear- good design and non-skid soles
- Take smaller steps when walking
- Walk slowly and **Never run** on icy ground
- Keep both hands free- avoid putting your hands in your pockets. **Hands-free helps you keep your balance**
- Avoid carrying loads
- **Look where you are going**
- Test potentially slick areas by tapping your foot on them; go around

- Step out or down from vehicles, testing the area with your foot. **Never jump down!**
- Try to keep your own walkways clear and treated with appropriate ice-melt products; reapply on an as-needed basis for safety

PLAN AHEAD:

- Wear shoes/ boots that provide traction on snow and ice (Rubber and neoprene composite); avoid leather soles and plastic!
- Give yourself plenty of time and plan your route
- Walk in designated walkways as much as possible
- If a walkway is completely covered in ice, try to walk along the grassy edge for traction
- Be really proactive and take along /wear a pair of Trex or Yaktrax ice walkers

When there is no choice but to walk on an icy surface, here are a few items to consider:

- Take short steps or shuffle your feet for stability
- Bend slightly, walk flat footed (**think “penguin” steps**)
- Be prepared to fall
- If you start to fall, relax as much as you can, and roll with the fall. Try to avoid using your arms/ hands (think broken wrists!)
- Try to twist and roll backwards to avoid falling face first. You want to avoid slamming your head on the pavement
- If you are carrying something-Toss it! Protect yourself instead of the object

When you reach a stairway, **ALWAYS** hold the handrail the entire length, to keep you from falling on accumulated water/ snow/ ice on the stairs.

Remove as much snow and water from your own footwear to prevent tracking wet, slippery debris indoors.

When entrance mats become saturated and dirty with accumulated debris, change them out. Using mats that are at least 12 feet in length will help remove 85% of water and snow that is tracked in to the facility.

SAFE LIFTING TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS HANDLING TO AVOID WORKPLACE INJURIES

Can you think of even one job or occupation where you never have to lift an object?

Lifting of objects can range from very light such as a folder with papers, to very heavy such as a load of boxes.

Lifting incorrectly can result in a variety of injuries. Lifting heavy items is one of the leading causes of injury in the workplace.

Shoulder and back injuries involving missed workdays account for nearly 40% of the injuries reported.

Overexertion and cumulative trauma were the biggest factors in these injuries.

When employees use smart lifting practices and work in their “power zone”, they are less likely to suffer from back sprains and strains, muscle pulls, wrist and elbow, spinal and other injuries caused by lifting heavy objects.

Key items to keep in mind:

WEIGHT OF OBJECTS:

Any lift over 50 lbs. will increase the risk of injury. If you must lift this weight, ask for help from a co-worker, or use a lifting device- dolly/cart. Very heavy objects such as lumber, etc., should be moved using a forklift.

AWKWARD POSTURES:

Bending while lifting forces the back to support the weight of the upper body in addition to the weight of the object you are lifting.

Bending moves the weight of the load away from the body.

Reaching moves the load away from the back increasing the effective load.

Carrying loads on one shoulder, under an arm or in one hand creates uneven pressure on the spine.

Poor housekeeping limits access to objects being lifted and forces you into an awkward posture.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

- Move items closer to your body and use your legs when lifting
- Store items needing to be lifted manually at the **“POWER ZONE” height:** mid-thigh to mid-chest level
- Avoid twisting especially when bending forward. Turn by moving the feet rather than twisting the torso
- Keep elbows close to body and keep load as close to body as possible
- Break down larger loads into smaller less bulky loads; if this is not possible, use a cart/ dolly or team lifting approach

- Pre-plan the lift and the route, and be sure to pay attention to items in the pathway. Good housekeeping is important, also.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER:

Cold temperatures can cause decreased muscle flexibility which can result in muscle pulls. Conversely, excessively hot temperatures can lead to dehydration and increased metabolic load. Low visibility or poor lighting increases the chance of slips and falls.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

- Adjust work schedules to minimize exposure to extreme temperatures
- Wear warm clothing; dress in layers; obviously, in hot temperatures, dress accordingly in light-weight fabrics; wear a hat
- Drink plenty of water even in the winter to avoid dehydration. Avoid sodas and too much caffeine.
- Provide proper lighting especially in those areas of work that are dark in early morning and late afternoon. Consider lights on timers.

It is also important to **STRETCH** during the day to increase flexibility. Take breaks letting shoulders and neck muscles go limp. Move your neck around and stretch out arms and fingers. Muscles and ligaments weaken over time from lack of exercise, so keeping physically fit is important for everyone.

Taking care of your body with exercise and proper posture, a sensible diet and adequate rest will help you avoid injuries both at work and at home.

Snow Blower Safety

Winter is on our doorstep, so now is a good time to review Snow Blower Safety.

Here are some startling statistics on snow blower injuries:

- In recent years snow blower injuries accounted for close to 600 finger amputations
- In the past 30 years, 19 people have died as a result of snow blower accidents; 5 people died from carbon monoxide poisoning due to operating/running the snow blower in a closed space.



The typical person

who is injured when using a snow blower is:

- Male - 44 Years Old
- 90% of the injuries are to the dominant hand

Typical injury causes are:

- The exit chute was clogged with snow
- Operator tried to clean out the chute with his hand
- Hand comes in contact with the blades of the agitator/chute

Common sense Safety Tips when using a snow blower:

- **Review and understand the Operating Instructions**
- **Walk around the area where you will be working-prior to a predicted storm- to remove any debris that may get caught up in the mechanism**
- **Please remember about the stored energy when the snow blower shuts down**
- **You should have a plastic guard/ chute stick or sawed off broom handle to remove snow/debris from the exit chute/agitator.**
- **Always turn the machine off and disconnect the spark plug when you are trying to remove clogged snow/debris from the exit chute**
- **NEVER put your hands down the exit chute or near the blades and moving parts**
- **Move the snow blower into a garage, if possible, so that snow and ice can melt; it is then easier to remove packed snow/ ice from the chute**
- **Keep the guards/shields in place at all times**
- **NEVER fuel the engine when it is running or it is warm**
- **Dress properly which includes proper footwear.**
- **Be aware that clothing/scarves can become caught in the snow blower**
- **Stay hydrated**

For **SAFETY SAKE**, please review snow blower safety with your employees on an annual basis and if possible, prior to every storm.

News Release

U.S. Department of Labor

Nov. 16, 2015

OSHA seeks public comment as it updates Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration is seeking public comment on an updated version of its voluntary [Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines](#). First published in 1989, the guidelines are being updated to reflect modern technology and practices.

These guidelines are intended to help employers establish health and safety management plans at their workplaces. Key principles include finding and fixing hazards before they cause injury or illness, and making sure that workers have a voice in safety and health.

The updated guidelines should be particularly helpful to small- and medium-sized businesses. They also address ways in which multiple employers at the same worksite can coordinate efforts to make sure all workers are protected.

"The goal of safety and health management is to prevent workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths," said [Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Dr. David Michaels](#). "Employers who embrace these guidelines will experience lower injury and illness rates, and their progress in improving the safety culture at their worksites will contribute to higher productivity, reduced costs and greater worker satisfaction."

For more information and to review the draft guidelines and provide comment, visit OSHA's [Safety and Health Program Management webpage](#). Comments will be accepted until Feb. 15, 2016. Comments can also be posted directly to [www.regulations.gov](#) using Docket #OSHA-2015-0018.

The guidelines are advisory only and do not create any new legal obligations or alter existing obligations created by OSHA standards or regulations.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards,

and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit [www.osha.gov](#).



To inquire about Risk Control Services please contact:

Terry Buckhout, Risk Control Manager – 978-933-4143

William O'Connell, Senior Risk Control Representative – 978-933-4119