Safety Cop

Worker Safety Tips for Cold Weather

Exposure to cold weather involves many risks. Avoid problems this winter by taking proper precautions to ensure that outdoor workers know how to work safely in the cold. Some safety suggestions:

Exposure

• Have employees wear several layers of clothing to prevent frostbite and hypothermia. Workers should cover their heads to prevent heat loss, wear properly insulated gloves and keep feet dry.

• Keep a change of clothes to replace wet garments.

• Workers should be familiar with symptoms and treatment of frostbite and hypothermia, and where to go for emergency medical treatment.

• Limit exposure through shift rotation. Provide warm drinks and food during scheduled breaks. Fluids are important since outdoor workers easily become dehydrated.

• Don't forget the wind chill when gauging outdoor temperature.

• If necessary, use portable outdoor heaters safely.

• Keep paths clear and avoid work on wet or icy surfaces.

Driving

• Winterize vehicles. Check batteries, tires, windshield wipers, washer fluid and antifreeze. Keep portable phones charged.

• Insist drivers stay below posted speed limits in bad weather and keep a safe distance from the next vehicle.

• Provide travel containers for warm drinks.

Driving Reminders

• Be ready to reduce speed in case of sudden stops.

• Watch for icy patches on bridges and shaded roads.

• Use safe braking techniques to avoid skidding. Ease off the accelerator. If your vehicle has antilock brakes (ABS), brake firmly and steer. Without ABS, pump the brakes to avoid wheel lock-up. Always gently steer into a skid to regain control of the vehicle.

Overexertion

• Always consider the physical condition of anyone doing stressful outdoor or indoor work. Diabetics, heart patients and people with vascular and thyroid problems are more susceptible to cold-weather stress.

• Use motorized equipment to minimize demanding tasks such as shoveling snow.

• Thermally insulated tool handles are helpful in sub-freezing temperatures.

• Make workers aware of cold-weather stress symptoms and use a "buddy system" to monitor each other.

Carbon Monoxide

• Pay closer attention to carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning in winter. Symptoms include headache, fatigue, lightheadedness, shortness of breath, nausea and dizziness. High concentrations cause unconsciousness, coma and death. Fifty parts per million (ppm) is the permissible OSHA eight-hour time-weighted average; the NIOSH recommended exposure level is 35 ppm.

• Provide proper ventilation and exhaust systems for warehouses with propane-powered forklifts, loading docks and garages with closed bay doors.

• Operate all portable heaters according to manufacturer's specifications both indoors and outdoors. Outdoor exposure from improperly exhausted equipment can cause CO poisoning.

• Workers have taken ill from gasoline-fueled power washers, electrical generators, diesel-powered and similar equipment. Place generators outside, away from windows or air intakes.