

Cold weather safety

Introduction:

Work doesn't stop when it gets cold. Even mildly cold weather can be hazardous. Cold related illnesses can develop if you become chilled by low temperatures, brisk winds or wet clothing.

Hazards to watch for:

Prolonged exposure to freezing or cold temperatures can cause serious health problems. These problems can include:

- Frostbite
- Hypothermia
- Trench foot
- Death

Workers also may face an increased risk of cold-related problems if they:

- Take certain medications (consult your doctor).
- Are in poor physical condition.
- Suffer from illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Safe procedures:

- Recognize conditions that can lead to prolonged exposures to cold.
- Learn the signs and symptoms of cold-induced illnesses and what to do if they occur. Danger signs include:
 - Uncontrolled shivering.
 - Slurred speech.
 - Clumsy movements.
 - Fatigue.
 - Confused behavior.

- If these signs are observed, call for help.
- Wear proper clothing for cold, wet and windy conditions. Dress in layers for optimal warmth and ability to adjust to changing conditions.
- Have a change of clothing available in case of heavy sweating or clothing becoming wet.
- Take frequent short breaks in warm, dry shelters to allow your body to warm up.
- Schedule work for the warmest part of the day.
- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue, because energy is needed to keep muscles warm.
- Use the buddy system. Work in pairs so one worker can recognize danger signs.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages (sugar water, sports-type drinks) and soups. Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Eat warm, high calorie foods such as hot pasta dishes.

In conclusion:

People working outdoors during a Midwest winter as well as those working inside refrigerated warehouses should take precautions to protect themselves from the elements.

Now let's talk about some of the cold-related hazards we have here at work.