



USARPAC Safety Gram

ONE TEAM SAFETY



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Cold Conditions Demand Worker Awareness, Precautions

Unless one is fortunate enough to live in a climate of perpetual summer, or something close to it, working outdoors in inclement weather is a chilling reality for millions of people.

Extreme cold weather can be defined as any condition where temperature and wind, if any, combine to produce temperatures at or below -25 Fahrenheit (-32 Celsius). Without protective equipment such as hats, insulated gloves and proper footwear, workers are at great risk for both frostbite – especially to the ears, fingers, toes, cheeks and nose – and hypothermia, which kills an estimated 700 Americans every year.

Employees who must work in 20 F (-6C) temperatures for prolonged periods should be given frequent access to heated break rooms or tents. Where possible, shields should be set up to protect them against wind exposure.

Since sweating can quickly make a bad situation worse, employees should be encouraged to bring additional layers of clothing to work so they can change if required. However, any work that causes profuse sweating in cold temperatures needs to be examined because it is likely too strenuous for those conditions.

Warning signs of frostbite include discomfort, pain and numbness. Hypothermia symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, a feeling of being unable to warm up, drowsiness and slurred speech.

Some tips from the stress cards are as follows:

- ◆ Recognize various environmental and workplace conditions that may be dangerous.
- ◆ Learn the signs and symptoms of cold-induced illnesses and injuries and what to do to help workers.
- ◆ Encourage workers to wear appropriate clothing for cold, wet and windy conditions, including layers that can be added or removed as needed.
- ◆ During extreme weather conditions, allow employees to take frequent short breaks in warm, dry shelters, so that they can warm up.
- ◆ Try to schedule work for the warmest part of the day and try to avoid fatigue and exhaustion, because energy is needed to keep muscles warm.
- ◆ Where possible, have workers team up in pairs, so they can watch out for warning signs of cold-related health problems in one another.
- ◆ Avoid caffeine and alcohol, both of which interfere with the body's ability to regulate heat. Instead, drink warm, sweet beverages, such as heated sports drinks or sugar water.
- ◆ Remember that workers face increased cold-weather risks when they are in poor physical condition, have illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension or heart disease, or are taking certain medications.

In addition to dressing properly for cold conditions, it's important to eat regularly when you are out in the cold, especially foods high in carbohydrates and fats. Your body requires an enormous number of calories to shiver and keep warm. Avoid alcohol, contrary to the popular image of the St. Bernard dog delivering brandy to warm a frozen victim.

Try to keep moving while in the cold; don't be still. This helps to keep your body temperature up and circulation moving. If you think you are experiencing symptoms of hypothermia or frostbite, get to a shelter right away and seek medical help.

Remember: working or playing in cold weather can be a positive experience if you dress warmly and use common sense about protecting yourself.

