

While working in cold weather we are subject to the hazards that come along with cold, wet and windy weather. That means preparing for hazards that we normally don't think twice about. How we dress, how we walk and what we drink are all areas that require extra thought to prevent illness and injury when working in cold weather.

Here are 5 tips to keep you safe during the cold winter weather:

1. Beware of slips and falls.

Roads, driveways and parking lots can have patches of ice. This means walking slowly, keeping hands out of pockets for balance, and using handrails where provided. It is also best to wear shoes with rubber slip-resistant treads. In instances where walking on ice can't be avoided, take small steps and walk flat-footed with your weight distributed over your feet.

2. Wear proper clothing. Frostbite and hypothermia are both hazards of cold weather. It is important to wear multiple layers of clothing that will keep you warm and dry, as well as a pair of waterproof shoes or boots. The benefit of wearing multiple layers is that they can always be removed if you get too hot. But just like all safety equipment, layers of clothing will only protect you from the elements if you wear them. Depending on the weather in your area, you may need a heavy jacket, rain jacket or a wind breaker. It is a good idea to invest a little more into a higher quality pair of gloves and socks.

3. Drink plenty of liquids. Although many people associate staying hydrated with the summer months, it's just as important to drink fluids in the winter. Each time you can see your breath in the cold you are watching water leave your body. Drinking warm drinks also has the added benefit of keeping you warmer. Bring a thermos to work with your favorite hot beverage. Because you also burn more calories when exposed to the cold for extended periods, it is recommended to drink sports drinks for additional energy.

4. Optimize and conserve your energy. If possible, try to plan the majority of outdoor tasks for the warmest part of day. If extended periods outside are required, take frequent short breaks in a warm, dry location. This will warm you up and prepare you for the next exposure to cold weather. Another recommendation is to always work alongside a co-worker. This way you can monitor each other for signs of danger including fatigue, frostbite and hypothermia.

5. Know the signs of cold weather stress on the body and what to do if observed.

Frostbite:

- Redness or pain in any skin area
- A white or graying-yellow skin area
- Skin that feels firm or waxy
- Numbness, loss of feelings in body parts – usually occurs at the toes and fingers first.

Hypothermia:

- Shivering
- Confusion, memory loss, drowsiness
- Fumbling hands, slurred speech

Treatment for hypothermia and frostbite:

1. Seek medical attention as soon as possible
2. Get the person to a warm area or shelter such as a heated vehicle or a room
3. Remove wet clothing and provide dry clothing or a layer of blankets
4. Place areas affected by frostbite in warm (not hot) to the touch water