



Safely Working in Cold Weather

What's the danger?

In a cold environment, most of the body's energy is used to keep the internal core temperature warm. Over time, the body will begin to shift blood flow from the extremities and outer skin to the core (chest and abdomen). This shift allows the exposed skin and the extremities to cool rapidly resulting in an increased risk of hypothermia.

Combine this scenario with exposure to a wet environment, skin irritations may also be a problem. Some of the risk factors that contribute to cold stress are:

- Wetness/dampness, dressing improperly, exhaustion, fatigue, lack of sleep
- Predisposed personal health conditions
- Poor physical conditioning and diet

What's at stake?

Working in cold weather can have a chilling effect on your body. You are at risk for impaired motor function, impaired judgment, and cold stress injuries and illness. Cold and moist air places tension in muscles, making you vulnerable to muscle strains.

Hydration

Continually drink water through the work shift even in cold weather. The body core uses energy to keep you warm. Keeping well-hydrated eases the stress on the body core organs and keeps you warmer.

Slips & Falls

Slipping on icy, wet or muddy surfaces leads to injuries. Avoid slipping by ensuring soles are clean and have good treads to grip or have friction with surfaces. Clean mud off before climbing into trucks, onto stairs or equipment. Wet outdoor surfaces can form black ice in cold overnight temps. Ice control traction devices easily slip onto proper footwear to reduce the risk of slipping.



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Layer Up for Warmth

How to Protect Yourself

Dressing properly is extremely important in preventing cold stress. The type of fabric worn also makes a difference. Cotton loses its insulation value when it becomes wet. Wool, silk and most synthetics, on the other hand, retain their insulation even when wet. The following are recommendations for dressing to work in cold environments:

- Wear at least three layers of loose-fitting clothing. Layering provides better insulation. Do not wear tight-fitting clothing
- An inner layer of silk/synthetic keeps moisture away from the body
- A middle layer of wool/fleece/synthetic provides insulation even when wet
- Wearing an outer layer of wind/rain protection that also allows some ventilation to prevent overheating
- Wear a hat (even under hard hats) to help keep your whole body warmer; hats reduce the amount of body heat that escapes from your head
- Wear insulated or lined pants to obtain an extra insulating layer
- Use gloves to protect the hands (water resistant if necessary)
- A lightweight face scarf allows for easy breathing plus provides insulating and windbreak layer
- Wear insulated and waterproof shoes or work boots

Stretching

Practice stretching the upper and lower body, back muscles and shoulders before and after engaging work activities, at the beginning of the shift and after breaks. Stretching in cold weather loosens and prepares the muscles, tendons, ligaments, and one's mind for manual work demands.

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