



SAFETY SHARE

December 4, 2015

Working in the Cold

Even though it has not been very cold so far this year it still is important to remind ourselves that cold weather has the potential to impact our health and safety while on the job. Prolonged exposure to freezing or cold temperatures can result in serious health problems such as trench foot, frostbite and hypothermia. In extreme cases, including cold water immersion, exposure can result in death.

A pale appearance in fingers, toes, cheeks or noses that should be rosy from the cold can be an indication of frostbite. Another symptom of frostbite is loss of feeling in extremities.

A more severe reaction to cold is called hypothermia, which occurs when the body temperature drops to less than 90 Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow or slurred speech, memory lapses/confusion, frequent stumbling, drowsiness and exhaustion. If these signs are observed, seek medical help.

Here are some tips to remember:

- **Learn the signs, symptoms and dangers of cold-induced illnesses/injuries and what to do to help prevent them.**
- **Wear proper clothing for cold, wet and windy conditions including layers so you can adjust to changing conditions and temperatures.**
- **Be sure to take frequent short breaks in warm dry shelters to allow the body to warm up.**
- **Try to schedule work for the warmest part of the day.**
- **Come to work well rested, if at all possible, as fatigue saps the body of the energy it needs to keep muscles warm.**
- **Watch each other so that signs of cold stress can be recognized early.**
- **Drink warm beverages that are low in caffeine, or have no caffeine at all. Supplement with sports drinks as you can still lose body fluids and electrolytes even when it is cold. Eat warm, high-calorie foods such as hot pasta dishes to provide the extra calories the body needs to maintain its core temperature.**

Remember, some people face increased risks in cold weather if they take certain medications, are in poor physical condition, or suffer from illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension or cardiovascular disease.

According to the American Heart Association, employees with heart disease are at special risk in cold weather. As people age, their ability to maintain a normal internal body temperature often decreases. Because older people seem to be relatively insensitive to moderately cold conditions, they can suffer hypothermia without knowing they're in danger.