

WORK SMART IN COLD WEATHER

With cold weather upon us it's important to review some facts and guidelines for working in cold and freezing weather. Under the MIOSHA General Duty Clause, employers must ensure that employees are prepared to work in cold weather conditions. There are several conditions that create a risk exposure in this area. By sending employees out to shovel the parking lot, walkways, cleaning off cars or being stranded on road tests or shuttling customers, they can be exposed to the elements. It is important for everyone to be prepared with a good understanding of the hidden dangers of cold weather and of how to prevent overexposure.

The two most common health hazards are FROSTBITE and HYPOTHERMIA.

FROSTBITE: Body tissues may freeze when skin is exposed to extreme cold. The nose, ears, face, fingers and toes are at the greatest risk of frostbite. Permanent tissue damage and loss of movement can happen to affected part in extreme cases.

SYMPTOMS of FROSTBITE:

- 1) Feeling extremely cold, numb with possible tingling, aching or brief pain.
- 2) White or grayish yellow glossy skin, with possible blistering.

TREATMENT of FROSTBITE:

- 1) Warm frozen body part with blankets or warm (Not Hot) water.
- 2) Do not rub the body part, break blisters or drink caffeine.
- 3) Do not warm with a hot stove, heat lamp or hot water bottle.
- 4) Exercise warmed body part (but stay off frostbitten feet).
- 5) GET MEDICAL ATTENTION.

HYPOTHERMIA: Your body temperature can go down to dangerously low levels when you are exposed to extremely cold temperatures. It can occur at above freezing temperatures when it is windy, or when you are exhausted or wearing wet clothes. Hypothermia can lead to unconsciousness and death.

SYMPTOMS of HYPOTHERMIA:

- 1) Chills, shivering and numbness.
- 2) Slurred speech, poor coordination, confusion and drowsiness.

TREATMENT of HYPOTHERMIA:

- 1) Cover with blankets and/or provide body heat.
- 2) Do not give hot baths or use electric blankets or hot water bottles.
- 3) Keep person awake.
- 4) GET MEDICAL ATTENTION

Several factors increase the risk of frostbite and hypothermia and should be considered when we assign employees to work outside. These include age, weight, smoking and drinking, and certain medications. To help reduce the risk of exposure employees should do the following; avoid drinking and smoking before going outside, wear layers of loose dry clothes, and always properly cover the hands, head and feet. Employees should keep moving and take regular breaks in warm areas. Employees should always alert another employee when they will be outside for an extended period of time. Finally, they should move to a warm area if they start to feel cold or numb.

If the proper precautions are taken when working in the cold we can eliminate the risk of exposure.