

Tips To Protect Workers In Cold Environments



Working in cold conditions can increase the likelihood of workplace injuries due to reduced dexterity, impaired thought, and a rush to get work done in order to get out of the cold. Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures poses its own risks as well, such as frostbite and hypothermia. In extreme cases, including cold water immersion, exposure can lead to death.

It is important to remember that cold related injuries and illnesses can occur in a variety of places and not just outdoors, for instance, in food processing, and other cold in-door environments.

Danger signs include clumsy movements, uncontrolled shivering, slurred speech, fatigue, and confused behavior. If these signs are observed, move the person to a warm environment and call for emergency help.

How to Protect Workers

- Recognize environmental and workplace conditions that may be dangerous.
- Wet conditions, including heavy sweating, and inability to get dry increase the likelihood of hypothermia dramatically.
- While most likely at cold temperatures below 40° F, according to the NIH - National Institution on Aging (nia.nih.gov), it is possible to get hypothermia when temperatures are as high as 60° F.
- Learn the signs and symptoms of cold-induced illnesses and injuries, and what to do to help workers.
- Train workers about cold-induced illnesses and injuries.
- Encourage workers to wear proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions, including layers that can be adjusted to changing conditions.
- Be sure workers in extreme conditions take frequent short breaks in warm dry shelters to warm up.
- Try to schedule work for the warmest part of the day.
- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue because energy is needed to keep muscles warm.
- Use the buddy system - work in pairs so that one worker can recognize danger signs.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages (sugar water, sports-type drinks) and avoid drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, sodas, or hot chocolate) or alcohol.
- Eat warm, high-calorie foods such as hot pasta dishes.
- Remember, workers face increased risks when they take certain medications, are in poor physical condition, or suffer from illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, or cardiovascular disease.

Download and use the **Protecting Workers from Cold Stress** card from www.OSHA.gov.