Shoveling Snow Meeting Kit



Shoveling Snow Safety Talk

Winter weather brings many hazards for those individuals who have to experience it where they live and work. Whether it is driving in poor conditions or having to clear snow, any task done in winter weather conditions often results in a higher chance of injury. One winter weather work task that can easily result in injury is shoveling snow.

THE DANGER

(OSHA) urges employers, workers, and general public to be aware of the hazards involved when removing snow from rooftops, in and around commercial/business, public spaces and private property.

Significant Hazards

Workers removing snow face other significant hazards in addition to falls from roofs, including:

- Amputations, eye injuries, and other injuries associated with the use of snowblowers and other mechanized equipment.
- Falls from roof – top snow removal operations resulting in fatalities.
- Collapses or tip-overs when using aerial lifts.
- Entrapment and suffocation under falling snow drifts or snow piles.

OTHER HAZARDS

Exposure to Cold

Cold exposure can cause frostbite (freezing in the deep layers of skin and tissue) and hypothermia (drop of body temperature to less than 95˚F).

Physical exertion

Physical exertion during snow removal can also cause injuries and illnesses.

GENERAL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- Make sure a good quality shovel is used.
- The shovel used should be designed for the material it is used on. e.g. a snow shovel for shoveling snow.

- Do not shovel more than you feel comfortable, e.g. the shovel does not have to be full if the material is heavy.
- If the material is wet, e.g. wet snow or soil after rainfall, it will be considerably heavier.
- Use a shovel with a small scoop.
- Do not shovel after a heavy meal.
- Take the weather into consideration: If it’s hot take breaks and drink plenty of water. If it’s cold dress in layers and go slow.
- If you are cold warm up first. Stressing muscles while the body is cold is a sure way to cause strains and sprains.
- Take regular breaks, pace yourself.
- If you are not fit, or not used to shoveling, or you have a heart condition, strongly considering asking someone else to shovel, or go extremely slow. It is not unheard of for people to have heart attacks while shoveling.

REDUCE YOUR RISK

Shoveling Snow

- Avoid shoveling in the early morning when heart attacks most often occur.
- Warm up your muscles before shoveling.
- Don’t shovel soon after eating a heavy meal, drinking caffeinated beverages or smoking.
- Pace yourself, taking breaks every 15 minutes.
- When possible, push the snow, rather than lift it. When you do lift, pick up only a small amount at a time.
- Cover your head, and wear layers and skid-resistant footwear.
- Shovel the snow when it’s still fresh and powdery.
- Check with your doctor before shoveling if you’re sedentary and over 40, especially if you have risk factors or a history of heart disease.
- If you do experience chest pain, dizziness or other symptoms of a heart attack, chew an aspirin and call 911.

SHOVELING WET/HEAVY SNOW

- Use ice melt, salt, or sand to decrease the hazard of icy surfaces—and the stress of clearing them.
- Snow shoveling may cause a quick increase in heart rate and blood pressure.
- Cold air makes it harder to work and breathe, which adds extra strain on the body.
- Check with your doctor to see if you should be able to do at least moderate shoveling.
- Pick the right shovel for you. A smaller blade will require you to lift less snow, putting less strain on your body.
- Plastic shovels weigh less than metal shovels, and snow is not as likely to stick to them. These factors add less weight to your load. Spray the blade with a lubricant to keep snow from sticking.
- Pick up smaller loads of snow. It’s best to shovel by sections. If you are experiencing snowfall levels of 12-inches or higher, take it easy and shovel 2 inches off at a time.
- Try to clear snow early and often—take frequent breaks. Begin shoveling/blowing when a light covering of snow is on the ground.
- Push snow rather than lift it when possible, especially when the snow is heavy.

FINAL WORD

While the task of shoveling snow is a straightforward one there are many injuries that can occur while performing this task. Consider the injuries mentioned in this talk and the steps you can take to avoid an injury the next time you have to shovel snow. Discussion point: What other hazards and best practices are there when shoveling snow?