Working in a Winter Wonderland



Safety Talk

Sunlight sparkling off of snow and ice can be quite beautiful. It’s no wonder that some people love working outdoors, even during extreme weather. Unfortunately, you need more than a positive attitude in the bonechilling cold that covers most of North America during the winter months.

In this Safety Talk, we’ll learn about three conditions caused by working in the cold, how to prevent them, and precautions you can take to stay safe while working in a winter wonderland.

What Can Go Wrong
Anyone working in the cold should know the warning signs of cold exposure. The three most serious conditions are trenchfoot, frostbite, and hypothermia.

Trenchfoot is a painful condition caused by long exposure to cold water or mud. It can cause blisters, open sores, and, possibly, gangrene.

Frostbite happens when body tissues freeze. The most common body parts to suffer from frostbite are the fingers, toes, ears, and nose. Some signs to watch out for are numbness and a white and waxy skin appearance.

Hypothermia is a dangerous, and even deadly, drop in your body temperature caused by either exposure to extreme cold or decrease in your body’s heat production. Normally, your body temperature is about 98.6° F (37 C). Hypothermia occurs as your temperature drops below 95° F (35 C). Symptoms range from shivering and mental confusion to irrational behavior and unconsciousness.

How to Protect Yourself
By taking the right precautions, you can keep yourself warm and safe during the winter months. Here are some ideas to ward off winter’s chill:

Wear the proper clothes. Layer your clothing instead of wearing one thick layer. Try to wear mostly cotton, as it wicks away sweat from the body, which will keep you dry. Loose clothing not only allows for freedom of movement; it also helps blood circulate.
Wear a hat. Wearing a hat will help keep you warm. A good pair of gloves, warm socks, warm and waterproof footwear should also be part of your winter work wear. As an extra measure, keep a scarf and some extra socks on you just in case the temperature drops or the wind picks up.
Eat, drink, and be merry! Eat more calories than normal to replenish those lost

through physical exertion. Also, drink warm, sweet beverages to stay hydrated and to increase your calorie count. Avoid alcohol and caffeinated drinks, as these both contribute to dehydration.

Warm up by slowing down. Take frequent short ‘warm up’ breaks in a warm, sheltered area. This is especially important if it’s windy outside or if you find yourself becoming fatigued or exhausted. An electric heater can be used to keep a sheltered area warm.

FINAL WORD

While the winter can be beautiful, it can also be deadly. Health problems caused by exposure can be prevented. Use the tips in this Safety Talk to work safely in a winter wonderland