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Cold Weather Safety

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The cold weather is here and it is time to prepare. We all need to look out for each other and be aware of the signs and issues that working in cold weather can cause.

Tips for Working in the Cold

Planning ahead during the winter months is very important. By checking the weekly weather forecast, work can be scheduled around the weather to eliminate some of the exposure hazards. Workers should dress warm by layering with a wind-resistant outer layer. When the temperatures drop, the body loses heat through its extremities the fastest. Areas such as the fingers, toes, ears, and nose will be the first to be affected. Any exposed skin should also be covered to reduce the amount of heat that is lost. Employees can do this by wearing insulated gloves, hats, balaclava, scarves, neck tubes, and face masks. Boots should be waterproof and insulated and suited for the weather. We must also ensure that our winter gear does not interfere with wearing our personal protective equipment (PPE).

One of the best things we can do in any winter working situation is to stay dry. Wet clothing chills the body, making it harder to maintain its core temperature. If a person begins to overheat or sweat during a job, he/she can remove some of the layers or open his/her coat to cool down. We should also have a change of dry clothing available if our clothing becomes wet. Stay active to help generate body heat and reduce the effects of cold.

We should always be aware of the conditions around us and look out for our coworkers. Some of the severe things to watch for in colder weather are hypothermia and frostbite.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is defined as being cold over a prolonged period of time, causing a drop in body temperature. Watch for shivering, confusion, and loss of muscular control (e.g., difficulty walking). Hypothermia can progress to a life-threatening condition when shivering stops, or the person loses consciousness, then cardiac arrest may occur.

If you notice symptoms for yourself or others you are with, do the following:

- Get medical attention immediately.

- Lay the person down and avoid rough handling, particularly if the person is unconscious.
- Move the person indoors.
- Gently remove wet clothing and dry the person.
- Warm the person gradually and slowly, using available sources of heat.

Frostbite

Frostbite is a severe condition where both the skin and the underlying tissue (fat, muscle, and bone) are frozen. Skin appears white and waxy and is hard to the touch. There is no sensation – the area is numb or tingling.

If you notice frostbite symptoms for yourself or others you are with, do the following:

- Frostbite can be serious and can result in amputation. Get medical help!
- Do not rub or massage the area.
- Do not warm the area until you can ensure it will stay warm.
- Warm the area gradually; use body heat, or warm water (99°-104°).
- Avoid direct heat which can burn the skin.

Make sure you plan for the cold months ahead by preparing for each job assignment that you are given. The Warehouse is also a good resource for winter items and gear that works with PPE. Stay safe this winter and watch out for those around you.

