

Winter Safety

Although he may be an "Old Man," Winter is far from frail. In fact, he's mean and he's sneaky. He's apt to strike a deadly blow when you least expect it. Your workers need to be prepared for the effects of Winter's blow and taught how to look after their safety, both on and off the job. Here's a quick review of the risks and how to minimize them.

How to Avoid Hypothermia or Frostbite

One of the Old Man Winter's deadliest hazards is the risk of cold-related illnesses like frostbite and hypothermia. Signs of hypothermia include shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, stumbling, drowsiness and exhaustion. Frostbite symptoms are a loss of feeling and a waxy-white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, nose or ear lobes. In addition to making your workforce aware of the signs and symptoms of these illnesses, suggest precautions like the following:?

- Select proper clothing for cold, wet and windy conditions;
- Take frequent short breaks in warm, dry shelters;
- Perform work during the warmest part of the day;
- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue because you need energy to keep warm;
- Never work alone. Always have a buddy nearby;.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages. Stay away from caffeine and alcohol;
- Eat warm, high-calorie foods such as hot pasta.

If you suspect a co-worker is experiencing hypothermia or frostbite, warm the victim slowly with blankets or your own body heat. Put the person in dry clothing. Avoid giving the person coffee or tea.

How to Walk Safely on Snow or Ice

Snow and icy conditions make Winter peak season for slips, trips and falls. Offer your workers the following advice:

- Wear insulated boots with good rubber treads;
- Take short steps and walk more slowly so you can react quickly if you slip or fall;
- Keep both hands free for balance, rather than in your pockets;
- If you must walk on the street, walk against the traffic and as close to the curb as possible; and
- Wear bright clothing or reflective gear at night.

Other Winter Hazards

In addition to the obvious hazards, winter weather and conditions involve some more subtle dangers. You need to warn your workers and give them instructions about how to safeguard themselves, their co-workers and their families against the risk of the following hazards: ?

- Carbon monoxide poisoning especially from heaters;
- Electrocutation from powered lines that fall as a result of wind or snow and ice buildup;
- Falls from heights which can happen when shoveling snow off roofs;
- Roof collapse under heavy snow;
- Dehydration; and
- Back injuries or heart attack while shoveling snow.

Conclusion

Old Man Winter is not to be trifled with. Like other senior citizens, he deserves our full respect. And it's not just good manners. He's armed and dangerous. It's up to you to ensure that your workforce knows the danger so they can survive the weeks ahead.

