



Cold Weather Safety

Tips for keeping your
facility safe this winter.





*Is your facility and your workforce prepared for winter weather?
Here are some winter weather safety tips.*

Your Winter Weather Plan

To maintain productivity and reduce injuries and time off, consider winter safety and create a plan for your facility. A little time spent planning can go a long way. Consider things like:

- ◆ **Equipment Location:** Where are the shovels, snow brooms, salt, and wet floor signs?
- ◆ **Employee Assignments:** Who should stay home? Who will do the following: prep parking lots and walkways, plow, salt, check for slip mats, inspect areas, escort customers.
- ◆ **Inspections:** Will managers inspect employees' footwear? Will an employee be assigned to frequently check doorways?
- ◆ **Snow Removal Plan:** Does everyone understand the process before big storms roll in?
- ◆ **Employee Training:** Does everyone understand not just the plan, but best practices for staying safe in winter weather?
- ◆ **Communication of Plan Activation:** How will you let employees know when you're activating a winter weather plan?

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Keeping Your Facility Safe

Assess Your Floors

Your facility may have water on inside surfaces, garage floors, etc., ice on the lot, or entry mats that have bubbled up over time. Don't stand by when you can be taking preventative measures! Assess things like:

- ◆ Do you have entry mats at each entry door?
- ◆ Are staircases coated with grit?
- ◆ Is the floor slip-resistant?
- ◆ Can you designate an employee to perform housekeeping inspections?

Turning on the Heat

- ◆ **Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors** (both at work and home).
As furnaces see more use, there is a greater chance of a fire.
- ◆ **Monitor your facility's use of space heaters** to make sure they're used safely.

- ◆ Continue your **monthly fire extinguisher inspections**.

Safety on the Lot

- ◆ If there's snow to be cleared off vehicles, ensure those doing the work have **adequate clothing and are physically fit** enough to do the work.
- ◆ **Prepare the lot for plowing.** Will you move cars in the lot? Where do we move them?
- ◆ **When it comes to driving in the snow**, your team should fully scrape, clear, and clean any car that they plan on driving. Drivers should increase their distance from other vehicles, keep their headlights on during any precipitation or snow, and drive slowly as an extra precaution.

Safe Snow Removal

- ◆ **Try to remove as many manual processes as possible.** If employees do have to shovel or use snow blowers, they should stretch and warm up beforehand.
- ◆ When shoveling, move small amounts at a time. **Push snow, don't lift it!**
- ◆ **Follow all necessary safety procedures** for performing maintenance procedures on snow blowers and other snow removal equipment.



Keeping Your People Safe & Healthy

Slips, Trips, and Falls

Here's a winter scenario for you: During an accident review at a safety committee meeting, you discuss a recent injury where an employee slipped and fell on the ice while walking to their car.

The first question to ask is, did you make a serious attempt to get to the root cause of that slip? All too often, we say to ourselves, "We plowed the lot and spread some salt. How much more can we do?" The answer is yes, there is more that can be done! Here are some recommendations to help you eliminate winter slips, trips, and falls at your facility.

Develop a Footwear Policy

- ♦ **Develop a written policy** that will be included in the company handbook and made available to all employees. (Because tennis/street shoes do not make good snow shoes.)
- ♦ **Personally communicate the policy** to ensure employees have the proper footwear. Use an employee roster and check off each member who owns the proper footwear. This will assure them that the company takes the policy seriously, as any injury can affect everyone.
- ♦ **Ensure employee sign-off**, confirming that the policy was communicated clearly to every employee. This is helpful if you need to consider disciplinary actions for a violation.

Inspect Footwear

- ♦ Ensure your employees **wear appropriate footwear for the conditions** outside.

- ♦ **Conduct department inspections** to make sure employees have the proper footwear. Use an employee roster and check off that each member owns the proper footwear.
- ♦ **Reference your PPE plan** for the proper protocol if an employee does not own the proper footwear. (Keep in mind that a \$40 pair of boots cost much less than surgery after a fall.)
- ♦ **Consider providing over-the-shoe snow spikes**, which do great in the snow. However, employees must take them off as soon as they get inside, or they could slip very easily on a smooth concrete floor.

Illness Prevention

Illness can take a serious toll on your workplace. Colds and flu are more common in the winter months. So, make sure to do everything you can to protect your workforce.

- ♦ **Practice proper workplace hygiene.** This includes washing hands for 20 seconds, avoiding touching your eyes and face, sneezing into your elbow; and covering coughs.
- ♦ **Increase cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitation.** Wipe high touch surfaces, such as time clocks, throughout the workday.
- ♦ **Reduce transmission.** Symptomatic employees should stay home to rest and recover.

Understanding Cold Stress

Cold stress occurs when the internal body temperature is lowered. Typically, it starts when skin temperature is lowered by exposure to cold temperatures and conditions, eventually working its way inward. Ensure your employees recognize concerning health symptoms of common cold weather conditions. Some examples are:

- ♦ **Hypothermia:** A potentially life-threatening condition where the internal body temperature drops dramatically. **Symptoms:** Shivering, drowsiness or very low energy, weak pulse, shallow breathing, or confusion or slurred speech.
- ♦ **Chilblains:** Blood vessel inflammation caused by repeated skin exposure to cold temperatures. **Symptoms:** Small, itchy areas of skin, often on the feet or hands, sores or blistering, skin discoloration, swelling, or pain or stinging.
- ♦ **Frostbite:** Freezing of the skin and surrounding tissues that can cause permanent damage or amputation in worst case scenarios. **Symptoms:** Numbness, tingling, patches of skin in shades of red, white, blue, gray, purple or brown, clumsiness due to joint stiffness, or pain.
- ♦ **Trench Foot:** A type of immersion injury that is caused by continual exposure to cold and wet conditions. **Symptoms:** Numbness, pain, redness, or swelling.

Cold Stress Prevention

Preventing Cold Stress

To prevent cold stress, employees must recognize the hazards, understand the signs and symptoms, and plan accordingly.

- ♦ Like with any extreme weather, **monitor the weather conditions**. Pay special attention to wind chill temperatures and heavy precipitation events when determining whether work can be done safely.
- ♦ **Have a monitoring or buddy system in place for employees who work outdoors**. This is especially important for employees who have not acclimated to the weather conditions or who are returning after some time away from work.
- ♦ Employees should have **appropriate clothing and accessories to cover extremities and dress in layers**. Extra clothes, socks, and shoes are helpful if items get wet.
- ♦ To reduce the risk of cold stress, **move work indoors when possible or wait until warmer, less windy times of day** to complete required outdoor

work. Or, at minimum, schedule indoor rest breaks.

Risk Factors

In addition to exposure to the cold weather, additional risk factors include:

- ♦ **Lack of acclimatization** to cold weather conditions.
- ♦ **Improper clothing and shoes** can permit cold to permeate faster.
- ♦ **Exposure to wet conditions** can cause irritating skin conditions.
- ♦ Employees with low physical fitness or **certain health conditions, such as hypertension, hypothyroidism, and diabetes**, may be more likely to have a cold stress-related injury or illness.
- ♦ **Age**, as older adults cannot regulate body temperature as easily.

General First Aid Measures

- ♦ In an emergency, **call 911!**
- ♦ **Remove wet clothes** and replace them with dry clothes or blankets.
- ♦ Move to a **warm, dry area**.
- ♦ **Lightly cover extremities**. Be careful of applying excessive pressure.
- ♦ **Drink warm, not hot, sugary drinks**, such as sports drinks. Avoid caffeinated and alcoholic beverages.



An aerial photograph of a multi-lane highway covered in snow and ice. Several large trucks are visible, including a red semi-truck in the foreground and a white tanker truck further back. A yellow snowplow is also visible on the side of the road. The image is partially obscured by a dark teal diagonal shape that serves as a background for the text on the right.

Cold Weather Safety Takeaways

Snow, ice, freezing temperatures, and extreme wind chills can turn routine work into treacherous tasks. It's important to understand your facility's procedures for working safely in the cold. Remember these important tips for working in winter weather conditions.

- ♦ **Take your time.** Work, walk, and drive carefully and with purpose and awareness.
- ♦ **Be prepared!** Winter weather forecasts give advance notice of upcoming storms, blizzards, or other cold weather events. Have a plan in place for when severe weather is forecasted in your area.
- ♦ **Watch out for others.** Work in teams, communicate regularly, and watch out for symptoms of cold stress in others.
- ♦ **Modify as needed.** Adjust work schedules, tasks, and deadlines to complete work in hazardous conditions safely. Make sure those who are performing strenuous tasks, such as shoveling or clearing snow, can take sufficient breaks.