

Getting Ready for Winter Work

Working outside in the winter can be a dirty job, but many of us have to do it. Are you ready for winter work? Here are some reminders about dressing for the weather and staying strong, healthy and safe:

- Two big concerns of working or simply spending time outdoors in cold weather are frostbite and hypothermia. Both can occur at much higher temperatures than many people realize. Exposed skin can start to freeze at 28 degrees Fahrenheit (-2 degrees Celsius). Hypothermia is a potentially fatal condition caused by loss of body temperature. Symptoms include fatigue, nausea, confusion, light-headedness and profuse sweating. Without medical treatment the victim can lose consciousness and die.
- Wear the right gloves for the work you are doing. Gloves should have enough insulation to keep you warm and prevent frostbite, but be thin enough so you can feel what you are doing if you are manipulating controls or tools. Gloves which are too thick can also make your hands and wrists work too hard trying to hold on to objects, causing repetitive strain injury.
- Dress in layers of light-weight clothing, you stay warmer than a single layer of heavy clothes. Remove layers as necessary to prevent overheating and perspiring which can lead to chills or hypothermia later. Wear a hat, as much as half your body heat can go up in steam off the top of a bare head. Protect your ears from frostbite as well by wearing a hat or use ear muffs.
- While wearing a scarf or muffler might help keep your neck warm in the cold weather, it could also kill you if you work near rotating machinery. Check your winter wardrobe for entanglement hazards such as loose sleeves and dangling drawstrings.
- Keep your safety eyewear from fogging up in the cold. Investigate anti-fog coatings and wipes to see if these products are appropriate for your eyewear. If you have to keep taking off your safety eyewear because it fogs up, it isn't protecting you.
- Your winter footwear should have adequate tread to prevent slips and falls on wet or icy surfaces. For extremely slippery situations, you can attach clogs or cleats to your footwear. Slow down when walking across slippery surfaces and be especially careful on ladders, platforms and stairways.
- Eat winter-weight meals. This does not mean a high fat diet, but one with enough calories and nutrients to give you the fuel you need. Start with a breakfast of whole grain cereal and toast.
- Get plenty of rest. Working in the cold and even traveling to and from work in the winter takes lots of energy. Cold weather can strain your heart, even if you aren't overexerting yourself, so be sure to pace yourself when lifting heavy objects or shovelling snow.

Did you know that 70% of deaths during snow or ice storms occur in vehicles? It pays to carry blankets or sleeping bags, matches, candles, a snow shovel and sandbags, a flashlight, and non-perishable food such as cereal bars, in case a winter storm side-lines you in your vehicle.

