

TOOLBOX TALKS

Warm Up To The Cold Facts

Winter signals the need to take extra precautions, because prolonged exposure to cold can cause problems, particularly with workers who must spend a lot of time outside.

Frostbite is a severe reaction by the skin to cold that can permanently damage fingers, toes, the nose, and the ear lobes. The symptoms of frostbite are a loss of feeling (numbness), whitish skin, and sometimes blisters. If medical help is not immediately available, slowly re-warm affected areas, but do not soak in hot water, rub with your hands, or use a heat source!

Hypothermia occurs when the entire body becomes cold, and the body's core temperature drops below 95°F. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, drowsiness, disorientation, slurred speech, and exhaustion.

Keep the victim as warm as possible until medical help arrives. If the body temperature continues to drop, unconsciousness or even heart failure may result. Warm the body first and then the arms and legs, using blankets. Get the person into dry clothing if possible. Do not give the person any alcohol, hot beverages or food.

Using certain drugs for diabetes, heart and vascular conditions, and thyroid problems can increase the risk of cold-related problems. So can alcohol, nicotine and caffeine.

Dress for Cold Weather Success

If you will be working outdoors, wear loose-fitting, natural-fiber clothing. Wear several layers of clothing, rather than one thick sweater. The air trapped between the layers help to insulate the body. Outer garments should be tightly woven, waterproof material.

Mother was right – wear a hat! Half of the body's heat is lost through the top of the head! If there is wind, consider wearing earflaps or a hood, a scarf, and a facemask. Use the scarf to cover your mouth in order to protect the lungs from frigid air.

To protect your other extremities, wear mittens or gloves that fit snugly at the wrist, sturdy shoes, and two layers of warm socks.

Good Winter Work Practices

There are a number of things you can do to protect yourself from cold-related injuries:

- Allow a period of adjustment to the cold before actual work starts.
- Pace yourself to reduce the level of activity outside. Take extra breaks if you feel cold or tired, especially if the temperature is under 20° F.
- Use an on-site source of heat such as air jets, radiant heaters, or contact-warm plates.
- Shield work areas from drafts and wind or, if possible, move work to a shielded area.
- Use tools with insulated handles.
- Change any wet clothing immediately.
- Watch out for your co-workers.



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Frostbite

For anyone who has to work outdoors or in unheated buildings with limited warm areas during the winter months, frostbite and hypothermia are an ever-present hazard.

Frostbite is the result of ice crystals forming in the fluid and soft tissues of the skin. It is readily distinguishable by a white or grayish-yellow skin tint and the lack of pain or feeling in the affected skin tissue area. Blisters often appear. The areas of the body primarily affected are the fingers, toes, ears, cheeks, and nose.

A person who has frostbite once is more apt to get it again than someone who has not had it before. The injured part of the body may become sensitive to cold and must be protected from further frostbite.

Preventing Frostbite

To prevent frostbite, you should:

- Wear several layers of loose-fitting, natural fiber clothing.
- Particular attention should be given to protecting the feet, hands and head areas through the use of wool socks, gloves and/or mittens and ski mask or other head protection.
- Earflaps and muffs add protection for ears and neck against cold, and a face mask should be worn against windy weather.

Do *not* consume alcohol, because alcohol increases body heat loss.

Treatment

Whenever frostbite is detected, the following immediate action should be taken:

1. Protect the affected area from further injury until the patient can be moved indoors.
2. Wrap or cover the patient with blankets, clothing, or other warming materials.
3. Submerge the affected area in warm water (100 to 105 °F).
4. Provide patient with warm fluids – *never* alcoholic beverages.
5. Obtain medical assistance as quickly as possible.

Do not rub the affected area or apply a hot water bottle or heating lamp.

Preventing Hypothermia

To prevent hypothermia, you should:

- Maintain a nutritious diet that includes heat-producing foods such as carbohydrates. Drink plenty of liquids – but not alcoholic beverages.
- If on medication, question your physician to ensure the medication does not counteract your body heat processes.



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- Wear adequate protective clothing, which includes several layers of natural fiber, loose-fitting outer garments and adequate food, hand and head protection.
- Remain dry. If clothing becomes wet, it should be immediately removed and replaced by dry clothing. Wool is the only natural material that affords insulation when wet.
- Avoid prolonged cold weather exposure.

Treatment

Whenever a victim displays hypothermia symptoms:

1. Move patient to a warmer environment.
2. Wrap patient in blankets or other warming materials. Remove wet clothing.
3. Make patient rest to conserve heat.
4. Give warm, sweet fluids – not alcoholic beverages.
5. Obtain medical assistance as quickly as possible.



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