

OSHA's Tips for Keeping Workers Safe in the Cold

OSHA is urging employers and workers to take necessary precautions to prevent and treat cold-related health problems.

Prolonged exposure to freezing or cold temperatures may cause serious health problems, such as trench foot, frostbite and hypothermia. In extreme cases, including cold-water immersion, exposure can lead to death.

Danger signs include uncontrolled shivering, slurred speech, clumsy movements, fatigue and confused behavior. If these signs are observed, call for emergency help.

OSHA's *Cold Stress Card* provides a reference guide and recommendations to combat and prevent many illnesses and injuries. Available in English and Spanish, this laminated fold-up card is free to employers, workers and the public. Tips include:

How to Protect Workers

- Recognize the environmental and workplace conditions that may be dangerous.
- Learn the signs and symptoms of cold-induced illnesses and injuries and what to do to help workers.

- Train workers about cold-induced illnesses and injuries.
- Encourage workers to wear proper clothing for cold, wet and windy conditions, including layers that can be adjusted to changing conditions.
- Be sure workers in extreme conditions take a frequent short break in warm, dry shelters to allow their bodies to warm up.
- Try to schedule work for the warmest part of the day.
- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue because energy is needed to keep muscles warm.
- Use the buddy system – work in pairs so that one worker can recognize danger signs.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages (sugar water, sports-type drinks) and avoid drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, sodas or hot chocolate) or alcohol.
- Eat warm, high-calorie foods such as hot pasta dishes.
- Remember, workers face increased risks when they take certain medications, are in poor physical condition or suffer from illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension or cardiovascular disease.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines, U. S. Department of Labor