

STEPS TO PREVENTION

- The first step to prevention is recognition. Recognize potential hazardous conditions that could lead to cold-induced illness and/or injury.
- Layer clothing when working outside for long periods of time. Appropriate clothing includes boots, hats, gloves, and multiple jackets.
- Bring extra pairs of socks and gloves as well as additional hats, blankets and a change of clothes.
- Take short, frequent breaks in a warm, dry area to allow the body to regain warmth.
- Either utilize the buddy system by working in pairs or ensure that your co-workers know your location when working alone.
- Take note of the warmest times during the day and work during that time slot.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages while avoiding drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Eat high-caloric, warm foods during prescheduled lunch breaks.
- Keep hand and foot warmers handy while working outside.
- Do not touch bare skin to cold, metal surfaces.

What exactly is **cold stress**? While it can be brought on by different weather conditions throughout the country, cold stress occurs when skin temperature, and eventually, the internal body temperature is driven down. This can lead to serious health problems, tissue damage, and possibly death. Wetness and dampness, improper cold-weather protection, and exhaustion are all risk factors that could lead to cold stress.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

HYPOTHERMIA

Technically speaking, hypothermia occurs when the body's normal temperature of 98.6°F drops under 95°F. Obviously, measuring body temperature on the jobsite is impossible to do without the proper tools. There are other ways to tell that someone has gone into hypothermia such as uncontrollable shivering, loss of coordination, increased confusion, slurred speech, slow breathing or unconsciousness.

If a co-worker has gone into hypothermia, move the person to a warm, dry area, remove any wet clothing and replace it with dry clothing. In an emergency, call 911.

FROSTBITE

What is frostbite exactly? Simply put, it's the freezing of skin and tissue - something that can cause permanent damage to the body (including amputation) if not treated properly. The risk of frostbite increases in those with poor or reduced blood circulation or co-workers who are not dressed appropriately for extremely cold temperatures.

A frostbitten person will start to develop red, gray or white patches on their fingers, toes, nose, or ear lobes coupled with tingling, aching or a loss of feeling in the affected areas. If a co-worker starts exhibiting symptoms of frostbite, move them to a warm, dry place with dry clothes. **DO NOT** rub the affected area in attempt to warm it up, break blisters, use heating pads or place in warm water before getting medical help. You can place a soft linen or cloth over the affected area before medical help arrives.

TRENCH FOOT

One of the most overlooked risks of cold stress is trench foot, also known as immersion. It is usually caused by prolonged exposure to wetness and cold temperatures but can occur in temperatures as high as 60°F if feet are consistently wet. Wet feet can lose heat 25-times faster than dry feet causing non-freezing injury to occur.

Symptoms of trench foot include redness of skin, swelling, numbness, and blisters. In an emergency, call 911 immediately or seek medical assistance as soon as possible. Remove wet shoes or boots and socks then dry the affected area.

