

8 Tips for Working Safely in Winter

What's at Stake

Unless you're fortunate enough to live in a climate of perpetual summer, or something close to it, cold winter weather is a chilling reality for millions of people across North America.

What's the Danger

Winter creates a number of workplace hazards, ranging from the possibility of roofs caving in under snow loads, to workers being struck by falling snow and ice, to people tripping over snow-covered obstacles.

Example

In Arlington, Texas, six workers preparing Cowboys Stadium for the Super Bowl were struck by snow and hard ice that fell about 200 feet (approximately 60 meters) from the stadium's roof. While all the workers survived, one suffered life-threatening injuries.

A supervisor at a West Virginia coke plant wasn't as fortunate. He was struck in the head and body by a chunk of ice that fell from a conveyor as he walked underneath it. He died at the scene.

How to Protect Yourself

Here are some tips to help you stay safe:

1. Dress appropriately for weather conditions and don't forget to consider wind chill factors. Dress in layers that can be removed or added as needed. Know the dangers of hypothermia and frostbite and take frequent warm-up breaks in cold weather conditions.
2. Watch out for slipping and fall hazards on icy surfaces

outdoors. Wear appropriate footwear and ensure that outdoor walkways are kept clear and sprinkled with sand to reduce the chances of slipping. Take shorter steps and don't hurry across potentially treacherous surfaces.

3. Drive with extra care in winter. Ensure that your vehicle has snow tires with plenty of tread. Slow down and allow yourself extra time to get to your destination. And maintain a greater distance between your vehicle and traffic ahead during the winter months.
4. Make yourself visible. Darkness comes early during the winter months. Ensure you are visible when walking and working in conditions where vehicles such as trucks, heavy duty equipment or forklifts are moving. Wear a reflective vest and carry a flashlight when walking.
5. Ensure ventilation is adequate when working indoors. Closing bay doors to conserve heat can result in carbon monoxide poisoning if machinery with internal combustion engines is operated. Never operate a gasoline-powered generator or fuel-burning heater indoors.
6. Wear a hardhat when walking outdoors to protect your head against falling snow or ice. A hardhat will also protect your head in the event that you slip on icy surfaces. Remember that head injuries frequently cause permanent disability and sometimes, death.
7. Always carry a winter emergency supplies kit in your vehicle. It should include a fully charged cell phone, blankets or a sleeping bag, a distress sign, flares or reflectors, snack bars, water, a shovel, kitty litter or sand and first aid supplies.
8. Watch out for accumulated snow or ice that can melt on floors inside workplace entrances. A worker may slip and suffer serious injuries on a wet floor, especially a tile or linoleum surface. Post warning signs and keep floor areas clean and dry and place a doormat or rug at each entrance.

Final Word

As peaceful as freshly fallen snow can seem, it's important to

remember that the snow may now cover once-visible hazards or create new ones. When the temperature drops and the snow falls, it's time to raise your hazard awareness.