Cold Stress Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. Wind chill is the combination of air temperature and wind speed. For example, when the air temperature is 40º F. and the wind speed is 35 mph, your exposed skin receives conditions equivalent to the air temperature being 11º F. While it is obvious that below freezing conditions combined with inadequate clothing could bring about cold stress, it can also be brought about by temperatures in the 50’s coupled with some rain and wind.
2. When working outdoors in cold weather or working in artificially cold environments, such as refrigerated areas, serious cold-related injuries and illnesses may occur.
3. Snow shovelling is particularly strenuous because it uses arm work, which is more taxing than leg work. Straining to move wet and heavy snow is particularly likely to cause a surge in heart rate and blood pressure.
4. Many people hold their breath during the hard work, which also puts a strain on the body.
5. People at greatest risk are those who are habitually sedentary with known or suspected coronary disease, who go out once a year to clear snow, increase the risk. If you must do it, push rather than lift the snow, dress in layers, take regular breaks indoors and don’t eat or smoke before shovelling.

STATS

- Lost-time injuries and illnesses resulting from “environmental cold” spiked nearly 142% in 2018 – soaring to 290 cases from 120 the previous year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Those cases, plus the 280 reported in 2019, are a likely indicator of a lack of employer and worker understanding

about the dangers of cold stress.

- The CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics reports about twice as many people die of “excessive cold” conditions in a given year than of “excessive heat.” According to a study by the CDC, approximately 1,300 deaths per year as resulting from extreme cold exposure.
- Each year, approximately 2,000 workers die due to weather-related causes. Of that population, 63% of deaths are caused by exposure to cold and/or hypothermia, while only 31% are attributed to heat-related exposure such as heat or sun stroke.
- Across the U.S., deaths attributed to hypothermia or prolonged exposure to excessive cold have increased steadily in recent years. More than 1,000 people die of cold exposure in the U.S. every year. The National Weather Service says hypothermia can happen between temperatures of 30 and 50 degrees.