Snow Cold Outside

Working outside in the cold can be challenging, even for those who are used to doing so. The drop in temperature and increase in wintry weather can put you at risk for injury and illness. To reduce the impact of cold weather, you'll need to know the hazards it presents and prepare for them.

In this Safety Talk, we'll review some of the common, and unusual, hazards associated with working in the cold and learn what precautions to take to stay safe.

What Can Go Wrong

There are some winter hazards that most of us recognize immediately: slips and falls, back injuries while shoveling snow, and hypothermia or frostbite. However, there are additional hazards you need to be aware of:

Carbon monoxide poisoning n Being struck by icicles falling from roof lines
Electrocution from downed power lines
Roof collapse under heavy snow, and
Dehydration

You can prevent injuries, or even fatalities, caused by these wintry hazards by using safe work practices.

How to Protect Yourself

Winter work hazards can be controlled by knowing what to do when you encounter them. Here are some general guidelines on dealing with some of the common, and more unusual, winter hazards you might face:

To avoid **carbon monoxide poisoning** in the winter, make sure that proper ventilation is in place. Also, avoid using fuel-burning equipment in enclosed spaces and install carbon monoxide detectors.

Falling icicles are dangerous and have been known to kill workers. They aren’t called widow makers for nothing! To stay safe around icicles, don’t stand underneath them or place a ladder against a gutter covered with them. It could cause the icicles to break off and fall onto anyone standing below. To remove icicles, stand back, make sure no one is standing or walking underneath the roof line, and tap the icicles with a wooden pole. Don’t ever try to knock icicles off of an electrical or utility line.

Downed power lines are a real concern at any time of the year. Stay away from any downed or damaged power lines and report these immediately to your local electrical authority. Only a trained electrical worker can safely handle damaged power lines. Roof collapse from heavy snow can be prevented by proper snow removal. Try removing the snow from a safe distance, if possible. If you have to go on the roof, wear fall protection equipment, just in case.

Dehydration is mostly associated with summer time heat than wintry cold. But it can happen, especially when wearing heavy clothing, sweating, and breathing hard. So, drink lots of fluids and take plenty of rest breaks or work for shorter periods of time. Don’t drink alcohol as that only increases dehydration!

FINAL WORD

Remember to take precautions when working in winter weather conditions. You never know what kind of hazards you may face when working in the cold. Use the tips in this Safety Talk to control or prevent winter working hazards.