



016: Cold Weather Safety

Dangers of cold

Frostbite can easily result in the loss of fingers, toes, ear, and even your nose.

Excessive cold can cause severe fatigue or drowsiness. When you are fatigued or drowsy, you are at a much higher risk of doing things that are dangerous or even lethal to you and to others.

Excessive cold can cause light-headedness or euphoria, which would leave you in a state of impaired judgment.

Risk factors

Insufficient rest increases your likelihood of injury in general, and your likelihood of cold-induced injuries due to impaired judgment. A person who is 20% sleep-deficient is as mentally impaired as a well-rested person who is legally drunk.

Smoking greatly impairs circulation. Smokers have a much higher risk of frostbite than other people do.

Alcohol thins the blood, which is exactly the opposite of what the body needs in cold weather.

Many drugs have properties that impair cold weather endurance, and most illegal drugs are not compatible with cold weather at all. If in doubt about a particular drug, ask a pharmacist.

People with diabetes, heart problems, thyroid problems, and any of several other conditions have reduced tolerance for cold. If you have a medical condition, ask your doctor about cautions you specifically should take.

Protection

Wear your hardhat insulator. This is the easiest way to protect your ears. Also, since 30% of your body heat escapes through your head, this helps you stay warm, period.

Wear the appropriate thermal clothing: socks, boots, gloves, and underwear. Your ears, feet, and hands are most at risk, so afford them the most protection.

Stay hydrated. Soft drinks are loaded with sodium; drink water instead.

Keep a full set of dry clothes on hand, in case you get drenched. At the very least keep a spare set of gloves and socks. Make that two pairs, if you want to be prepared for a coworker in need.

Use the buddy system. You and your buddy should watch each other's skin, eyes, and general demeanor for signs that the other has reached a cold weather tolerance limit and it's time for a break.

If working outdoors, park vehicles or erect barriers to reduce wind.

Before going on an outdoor job on a cold day, bring a shelter and an outdoor heater.

Use tools that have thermal insulation or at least choose tools that have some sort of covering. For example, use a pair of pliers with plastic-dipped grips rather than unadorned steel ones.

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Obtain a cold weather hardhat insulator and demonstrate how to install it.

What this Safety Talk covers:

The dangers of cold weather and how to protect against them.

Discussion notes :

