

# Winter Working

Toolbox Talk H20



## Cold weather can cause health and safety issues on site, here are a few of the common problems to be aware of:

- Manual handling of cold, wet materials such as concrete blocks can damage the palm and fingers of the hand. Materials that have an icy coating such as bricks, block, timber, metal scaffold poles can become more difficult to grip and can slip from the hands. Gloves worn for warmth and grip can help manage this problem.
- Where ice or snow has formed the risk of slips, trips and fall injuries will increase. In areas such as external staircases, walkways around the site, footpaths in the welfare area and working platforms, routes should be kept clear of snow and ice.
- During winter months the days are shorter and there is a lack of natural light. The lighting on communal staircases should be of a sufficient level to allow safe access and egress from the building.
- Plant and vehicles on site should have the correct lights fitted and be in full working order. Headlights and reversing lights should be fully operational and clean. Operators' daily checks and formal weekly inspections should pick up these defects.
- Low temperature and wind chill can cause hypothermia and reduce dexterity and alertness. This is a particular concern for those operating plant or hazardous equipment. This needs to be considered when planning works.
- Laying bricks and blocks after the temperature has dropped or before it has risen above the recognised temperature may lead to a structure not being constructed to a required strength and possible future collapse.
- Wearing of the correct high visibility clothing during the dark periods of the winter months becomes even more important, staying visible reduces the risk of collision.
- Operatives that have tasks that require them to stand still whilst working may need extra protection from the elements. Extra PPE may be needed such as thermal boots, thermal gloves, weather and thermal coat and possible cold weather protection for the head.
- Welfare provision can be disrupted by frozen water and frozen water heaters, protect water supplies and insulate water heaters overnight to protect them from freezing and ensure they are ready for the start of work on site.

### Symptoms of Frostbite and Hypothermia

- When frostbite occurs, the skin is cold to the touch, white, and has a waxy appearance. If the skin has become frozen, it will be hard and look blotchy white to yellow or blue-gray.
- Hypothermia occurs whenever the body's core temperature is 95 degrees F or less. (Normal body core temperature is 98.6 F) In mild cases of hypothermia, the person may experience symptoms such as shivering, confusion, and stumbling. In severe cases, the person may lose consciousness, stop shivering, tighten up, experience a slowed pulse and / or breathing, etc.

## Preventing Frostbite and Hypothermia

- Check the weather conditions daily before going to work.
- Wear appropriate clothing to match the expected weather conditions.
- Layer your clothing, so you can adjust to changing temperatures.
- Wear hats, boots and gloves to protect easily exposed areas of the body.
- Limit your exposure to cold weather. When possible, take breaks in dry, warm areas.
- Try to avoid becoming fatigued or exhausted.
- Drink warm drinks throughout the day. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Eat a proper diet.
- Use a "Buddy System", where you work together with another person.
- If you think that you may be experiencing symptoms of frostbite and / or hypothermia, obtain medical assistance immediately.

### Questions to start discussion:

1. What are two dangerous conditions that you face when working in cold environments?
2. What are the symptoms of frostbite? Symptoms of hypothermia?
3. How can you prevent frostbite and hypothermia?
4. What should you do if you suspect you are experiencing frostbite or hypothermia?

