



Safety Message of the Day for IMEA Members



Extreme Cold Weather Hazards Safety Message

Cold weather and environments pose many hazards to employees who work in these conditions. A cold environment forces the body to work harder to maintain its temperature. An environment that is considered “cold” depends on the region of the country and the individual. Each unique situation needs to be analyzed and addressed individually to keep employees safe.

Cold Stress Health Hazards

(source: www.cdc.gov)

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in the affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes.

Trench foot, also known as immersion foot, is an injury of the feet resulting from prolonged exposure to wet and cold conditions. Trench foot can occur at temperatures as high as 60 degrees F if the feet are constantly wet. Wet feet lose heat 25 times faster than dry feet.

Hypothermia— When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body’s stored energy.

Safe Work Practices for Cold Environments

- * Eliminate or limit work as much as possible when extremely cold temperatures are present. (The ACGIH established recommendations for work in colder temperatures that can be found here.)
- * Allow for acclimatization to cold environments or weather. If the weather is extremely cold for the area or time of year, you will not yet be used to it and are more susceptible to succumbing to a cold-related illness.
- * Layer up on clothing and keep clothes dry. It is important to remove any wet clothing or boots and put on dry items when working in a cold environment.
- * Take breaks in warm areas or vehicles as needed.
- * Drink warm beverages to help warm up your core temperature.
- * Monitor the condition of other workers around you. If you notice something could be wrong, get them into a warm area and notify a supervisor.

Discussion points:

What other hazards does the cold bring?

How do we mitigate hazards related to cold stress?