

Cold weather safety

It has been a great fall so far!!! Temperature is cooling off, kids are back in school, leaves are changing!!! Of course, this means that winter is right around the corner. With that in mind, we need to prepare ourselves for the hazards that cold and winter weather brings. In this month's newsletter we are going to discuss two cold weather hazards: Cold Stress and Slips, Trips and Falls.

First, let's discuss cold stress. Cold stress typically comes in three different categories: immersion/trench foot, frostbite, and hypothermia. Let's look at each one and their respective first aid actions.

- 1) Immersion/Trench foot
 - a. This results in prolonged exposure to temperatures, potentially, as high as 60 degrees in cold and wet conditions. According to NIOSH, wet feet lose heat 25 times faster than dry feet!
 - b. Symptoms include reddening skin, tingling, pain, leg cramps, numbness, and blisters.
 - c. First Aid – If an emergency, get medical assistance as soon as possible. Remove wet shoes/boots and wet socks. Dry the feet, do not rub them, and avoid walking. Be sure to keep the feet elevated.
- 2) Frostbite
 - a. This results in freezing of the skin and tissues and can cause permanent damage or potential amputation.
 - b. Symptoms include reddened skin that begins to develop gray/white patches in the affected areas. There may be symptoms of tingling, aching or loss of feeling. The affected area may feel hard/firm with blisters.
 - c. First Aid – Get medical assistance immediately. Protect the area by wrapping loosely in dry cloth. DO NOT rub the area and DO NOT use water to warm (if the area is rewarmed and freezes again, more damage may occur – leave it up to the medical professionals). DO NOT break the blisters and give the individual warm sweetened drinks. **FOLLOW THE RECOMMENDATIONS BELOW FOR HYPOTHERMIA.**
- 3) Hypothermia
 - a. Hypothermia is a result of the body unable to regulate body heat. The human body has a normal temperature around 98.5 degrees, however if the body reaches a temperature of 95 degrees, hypothermia begins to set in.
 - b. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, loss of coordination, confusion, slurred speech, low heart rate or breathing and unconsciousness. A person with hypothermia may not know what is happening so getting medical help as soon as possible is crucial.
 - c. Call 911 immediately. Move to a warm dry area and remove any wet clothing and replace with dry clothing. If medical help is 30 or more minutes away, give warm sweetened drinks, if alert (no alcohol). Place warm bottles or hot packs in armpits, sides of chest and groin. Call 911 if additional rewarming instructions are needed.

The other hazard associated with the cold weather is slips, trips and falls. Here are some tips you can incorporate this coming winter.

- 1) Come up with a plan at your facility to remove snow and ice.
- 2) Be sure to have a good shovel and supply of salt pellets (or preferred material) to remove ice.
- 3) Create a reporting procedure in the event employees find icy conditions that need attention.
- 4) Wear appropriate shoes that have good traction and insulation for icy and cold conditions.

- 5) Provide cold weather gear for employees working outside.
- 6) When walking, take short steps, walk at a slower pace, and be prepared to react to changes in traction.
- 7) Plan! Monitor the weather conditions to determine safe work times. You can use the link https://www.weather.gov/wrn/winter_safety, for tips on winter weather.
- 8) When using ladders, be sure to inspect them for damage and remove any ice or snow that may have accumulated on them.
- 9) Report any icy or dangerous situations when working.

Living in Ohio, cold weather stress and icy conditions may be common and can be dangerous but are preventable. Before preparing for your workday, check the weather and wear the appropriate clothing. When evaluating the workplace, look for icy and dangerous conditions and report them as needed. When working outside be sure to take breaks to keep warm and drink fluids to stay hydrated. Finally, be able to identify signs of cold stress symptoms for you and your employees and their first aid remedies.

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