

"Self-insured Workers' Compensation Fund Members"

Cold Weather Safety

Extremely cold air comes every winter in at least part of the country and affects millions of people across the United States.

The arctic air, together with brisk winds, can lead to dangerously cold wind chill values. People exposed to extreme cold are susceptible to frostbite in a matter of minutes.

Areas most prone to frostbite are uncovered skin and the extremities, such as hands and feet. **Hypothermia** is another threat during extreme cold. Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce.

Cold weather can also affect crops. In late spring or early fall, cold air outbreaks can damage or kill produce for farmers, as well as residential plants and flowers. A freeze occurs when the temperature drops below 32°F.

Freezes and their effects are significant during the growing season. Frost develops on clear, calm nights and can occur when the air temperature is in the mid-30s. Each plant species has a different tolerance to cold temperatures.



Winter weather can expose outdoor workers to frostbite, hypothermia, and cold stress, all of which can be fatal. It is important to know the wind chill temperature to better prepare and perform the work safely.

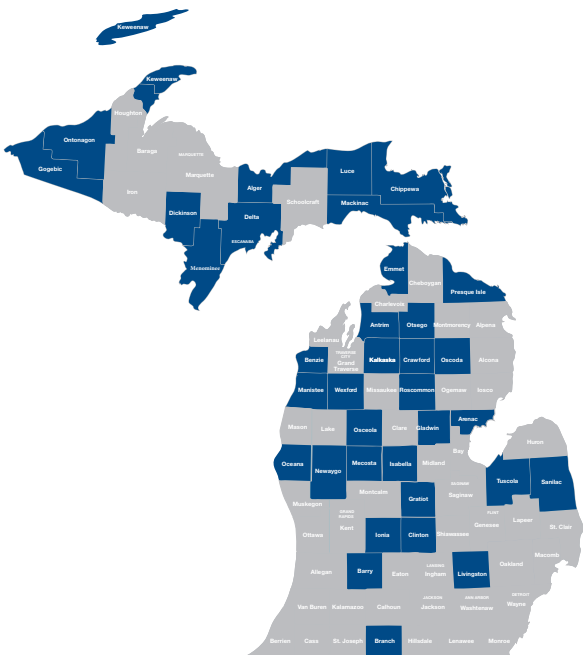
Follow these work practices to stay safe in cold weather:

- Know the symptoms of cold stress; reddening skin, tingling, pain, swelling, leg cramps, numbness, and blisters.
- Dress properly; wear at least three layers of loose-fitting clothing, insulated gloves and boots, and cover your head.
- Monitor your physical condition and that of your coworkers.
- Stay dry and pack extra clothes; moisture can increase heat loss from the body.
- Take frequent breaks in warm, dry areas.
- Drink warm liquids.

Dangers of Working in Cold Weather

Winter storms inflict high costs on businesses, from disrupted supply chains to road conditions that impede employees and customers from reaching your location. Additionally, extreme cold weather often leads to an increase in workplace injuries. Optimum Safety Management estimates that between direct and indirect costs, employers will spend \$120,000 for a single workplace injury.

Slips, trips, and falls are already one of the most common workplace injuries, with 211,640 non-fatal cases in 2020 alone, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. These slip, trip, and fall hazards escalate during the winter months, along with a variety of other cold-weather hazards, including frostbite, hypothermia, trench foot, and other cold-related illnesses.



CONTACT US TODAY! (800) 258-1152 | www.michigancountieswcf.org



Timothy K. McGuire
MCWCF Administrator
tmmac24@gmail.com



AJ Hale
CompOne Risk Mngt Services
ajhale@compone.net

Depending on road conditions and your work options, your business may enact a **winter safety plan**, reminding employees of winter driving safety policies or telling non-vital workers to stay home until it's safe to come to the office.

But for many employees, work must go on, despite severe winter weather. For these employees, in particular, winter hazards abound. Workers who are most vulnerable to the dangers of cold weather include:

- People who work outside most or all of the time, such as construction workers, lumber workers, utility line technicians, and agricultural workers
- Essential workers who may have to navigate through the elements—including mail carriers, social workers, first responders, and those in the transportation industry
- Service professionals who switch between working inside and outside during their shift, including plumbers, cable service technicians, and electricians
- Workers who labor in poorly insulated or non-heated areas such as freezer storage
- Older adults and individuals with diabetes, hypertension, hypothyroidism, and other pre-existing health problems

Are there MIOSHA/OSHA regulations related to cold-weather safety?

While there is no MIOSHA/OSHA standard specific to worker safety in cold-weather environments, employers have a duty to provide workers with a place of employment free from recognized hazards—and that includes cold stress. Also known as a duty of care, the safety of employees is the responsibility of employers according to OSHA's general duty clause.

This concerns some businesses: If they're told to prepare for cold weather but aren't given specific guidelines to do so, how can they prepare sufficiently? The reality is that cold weather can be an enormous danger, but the risks it presents are both manageable and foreseeable.



Having a plan for cold-weather safety will help you avoid injuries and reduce worker's compensation claims, days lost, and other disruptions to business continuity.

Cold-Weather Safety Tips for Business Leaders and Employees

Preparedness tips for safety leaders

Winter weather can be very serious and storms can intensify quickly, so it's important to have a plan in place for those who are exposed to the elements for part or all of their workday. Creating a plan for the cold months will help mitigate incidents and empower employees to react quickly if a problem arises.

If you don't yet have a winter safety plan, consult OSHA's winter weather preparedness guidelines as you develop your workplace safety plan. At a minimum, employers should be prepared to:

- Define possible emergencies and establish protocols for responding to incidents and injuries efficiently
- Implement and enforce safe working practices, such as frequent breaks in warmed areas
- Plan to record any cold-related safety incidents and use an after-action report to review any necessary actions

Cold-weather preparedness tips for employees

As an employee, you should be confident that your employer is familiar with the risks you face working in the snow and cold and will provide adequate training and equipment to keep you safe. However, your participation in your safety is equally important. Familiarize yourself with your organization's cold-weather procedures so you're fully prepared when in the field.

Depending on the type of work you do, you might find yourself outdoors in a city, alone in a remote location, or somewhere in between. It's also important to keep in mind that material support, such as warming stations, medical services, and other employees, can be highly variable and subject to your accessibility. When reviewing new cold-weather plans for the first time, think about the support you'll have while on the job and raise any questions or concerns as soon as possible. Any safety concerns, immediately raise them with your supervisor.

Make prevention an everyday responsibility

Cold-weather hazard prevention tips for safety leaders

As you know, some work just has to be done in the cold. But not all cold is created equal. In fact, large temperature swings, upwards of 50°F, are regularly recorded in single days during winter months, so it's important to pay attention to daily weather forecasts and try to make the schedule work in your favor.

If more tasks are scheduled during the warmer hours and fewer in the early morning/late-night cold, your workers will be less likely to face dangerous conditions.

No matter how well you plan, sometimes Mother Nature has a surprise up her sleeve. That's why it's important to keep in contact with your employees at all times.

Not only should you be able to reach out to them with updates or changes to the plan, but they should also be able to contact you to report emergencies or ask questions.

Include cold-weather safety topics during meetings in winter months, perhaps as part of your monthly safety topics initiative.

By maintaining an emphasis on cold-weather safety, you're much more likely to succeed in incorporating it into your safety culture.

If your work requires you to be exposed to cold temperatures for extended periods of time, the most important defense you have is your clothing.

Make sure to wear multiple layers of appropriate thickness, and be sure to consider how these heavy clothes might limit your range of motion while performing your tasks.

Winter emergency supply tips for safety leaders

Necessity is the mother of invention, and thanks to the harsh conditions of winter, we have a wide variety of tools to help us cope with the challenges we might face. Here are the tools employers should keep stocked in emergency supply kits around the office and worksite, as well as in company vehicles.

- Foil and/or wool blankets
- Ice scraper
- Snow brush
- Shovel
- Flashlight
- Extra batteries
- Road maps
- Jumper cables
- Road flares or reflective warning triangles
- Basic first aid kit

Stay ahead of injuries related to cold-weather events, have a Plan and Train Employees and Staff.

DRESSING FOR COLD WEATHER

CHILLY



COLD



EXTREME COLD

