WINTER WORKING

We are now entering the time of year where, statistically, most accidents occur. There is a direct link due to the changes in daylight hours, including darker evenings and mornings and weather conditions that occur at this time of year.

Be prepared

Working in the cold winter weather is very similar in some ways as working in the extreme heat: you have to be prepared for it, you have to be equipped for it and you have to get accustomed to it.

For example, it is easy to become dehydrated in cold weather. We typically think of dehydration as a heat-related issue, but it applies to cold weather as well. It's important to drink plenty of fluids before starting work. Warm, sweetened liquids can be especially helpful, while alcoholic drinks should be avoided. Remember, it is just as important to hydrate yourself before starting work as it is during the actual physical activity.

What you should do

- Wear at least three layers of loose-fitting clothing. Layering provides better insulation. Avoid tight fitting clothing. An inner layer of wool, silk or synthetic to keep moisture away from the body. A middle layer of wool or synthetic material for insulation, even when wet. An outer layer for wind and rain protection with some ventilation to prevent overheating
- Use a knit mask to cover the face and mouth (if needed).
- Protect your hands with insulated gloves (water-resistant if necessary).
- Wear insulated and waterproof boots.

Acclimatising to Cold Weather

Similar to working in extreme heat, acclimatising to cold weather is essential. The first day in cold conditions can be challenging. It's best to start slowly and allow your body to adjust. If your work involves high physical activity outdoors, consider doing stretching exercises indoors before starting your tasks outside. This will help your muscles warm up gradually, reducing the initial shock of being active in very cold conditions.

If possible, schedule heavy work during the warmer part of the day. Employers can assign workers to tasks in pairs (using the buddy system) to monitor each other for signs of cold stress. Workers should be allowed to interrupt their work if they become extremely uncomfortable. Employers should also provide workers with frequent breaks in warm areas.

Other Safety Tips

- Know the symptoms of cold stress.
- Monitor your physical condition and that of your co-workers.
- Stay dry in the cold because moisture or dampness, e.g. from sweating, can increase the rate of heat loss from the body.
- Keep extra clothing (including underwear) handy in case you get wet and need to change.
- Use proper engineering controls, safe work practices, and personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by your employer.

Frostbite & Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a potentially fatal condition caused by a loss of body temperature. For example, exposed skin can begin to freeze at just 28 degrees Fahrenheit (-2 degrees Celsius), and deep frostbite can lead to blood clots and even gangrene.

Symptoms include fatigue, nausea, confusion, light-headedness, and profuse sweating. Without prompt medical attention, the victim can lose consciousness and may die.

Loose Material / High Winds

- Ensure that no loose materials are left lying around on upper floors where they can be blown off
- DO NOT stack materials vertically, unrestrained as they can be easily blown over
- Take care when stacking materials at height, scaffold boards are to be stacked together correctly and physically secured against inadvertent movement.
- Scaffold boards fitted to form the working platform should be secured against uplift by fitting proprietary board clamps.
- Be aware of other site operations that may become a direct hazard, i.e. coming into contact with dust producing operations.

Wind Chill Chart

Temp (Celcius)

Wind Speed (Mph)	calm	10	8	6	4	2	0	-2	-4	-6	-8	-10
	10	8	5	3	0	-2	-5	-7	-10	-12	-15	-17
	20	6	4	1	-1	-4	-7	-9	-12	-15	-17	-20
	30	6	3	0	-3	-5	-8	-11	-13	-16	-19	-22
	40	5	2	-1	-3	-6	-9	-12	-15	-17	-20	-23
	50	4	2	-1	-4	-7	-10	-13	-16	-18	-21	-24
	60	4	1	-2	-5	-8	-11	-13	-16	-19	-22	-25
	70	4	1	-2	-5	-8	-11	-14	-17	-20	-23	-26
	80	3	0	-3	-6	-9	-12	-15	-18	-21	-23	-26
	90	3	0	-3	-6	-9	-12	-15	-18	-21	-24	-27
	100	3	0	-3	-6	-9	-13	-16	-19	-22	-25	-28

Frostbite times

- 30 Minutes
- 10 Minutes
- 5 Minutes

DON'T WEAR HOODIES OR BEANIE HATS UNDER YOUR HARD HAT

In many situations, such as working on a construction site, it is a requirement to wear suitable head protection such as an EN397 industrial Safety Helmet. At this time of year we start to see a large number of workers wearing their hoodies or beanie hats under their safety helmets to keep them warm. This not only endangers themselves by compromising the fit of the helmet, but also endangers others if the helmet were to fall off of their head from a height.

FAQ: Why is it bad to wear a hoody or beanie under a safety helmet?

By wearing a hoody/beanie (or other winter hat) under your safety helmet, you are interfering with the fit of the harness. Wearing anything underneath the helmet means that it cannot be fitted, adjusted or worn to the manufacturer's safety requirements, putting yourself and others in danger. A hoody also reduces your field of vision. This greatly increases the chance of an accident as the wearer may be unaware of oncoming plant machinery, trip or fall hazards or other individuals working.

FAQ: What can we safely wear to keep our heads warm on site?

The best practice would be to only use manufacturer approved head warmers under your safety helmet. This will ensure you receive the best possible fit for your safety helmet without compromising on safety.