Viewpoint Blog

Cold Weather Jobsite Safety Tips for Construction

When cold weather and extreme temperatures strike, make sure you are ready.

With cold, winter weather upon us, it's critical to keep workers comfortable and safe on the jobsite in addition to protection from the COVID-19 virus. According to the most recent data published by the Bureau of Labor Services, in recent years upward of 20,460 workplace injuries were caused by snow, sleet, or ice. Prolonged exposure to cold and freezing temperatures on the job can result in frostbite, hypothermia, and even death. Cold stress is when the body cannot maintain a normal temperature. It occurs by driving down the skin temperature and eventually the internal body temperature.

How do you prevent jobsite safety hazards, including cold temperatures and extreme weather? Cold weather-related illnesses and injuries can be prevented by following the guidelines below.

It's Windy! Consider Wind Chill.

Ensure all workers have warm gear including jackets, gloves and insulated footwear.

Wind chill, or wind chill factor, is the sensed decrease in air temperature felt by the body because of the flow of air. The National Weather Service calculates wind chill based on average adult measurements and wind speed. Knowing the wind chill temperature can help you gauge employees' exposure risk and keep them safe on the jobsite.

Protection Equals Safe Productivity

In cold, wet, windy weather, safe work practices can make the difference between productivity and jobsite safety versus wasted time and construction project delays.

- Have a reliable way to communicate with workers, especially those in remote areas, during storms and extreme weather to ensure all are accounted for in case of evacuation or schedule changes.
- Properly de-ice and inspect machinery and tools, as well as pathways and scaffolding. Falls are the number one cause of cold-weather injuries.
- Schedule jobs that expose workers to cold weather during the warmest part of the day.
- Limit time spent outdoors, and allow and encourage frequent breaks.

- Consider relief workers and shared tasks to limit exposure on demanding, outdoor jobs.
- Provide warm areas for breaks, outdoor heaters, warm drinks, and extra gloves, hats, and layers.
- Ensure all workers are equipped with warm gear, including base layers, jackets, gloves, hats, and insulated footwear. Encourage employees to keep an extra change of clothes in case of wet clothing.
- Enact a buddy system, assigning at least two workers together in cold, remote locations.
- Maximize jobsite safety by preparing for a flexible schedule - weather changes quickly, so can your project in response.

Be Cool By Becoming Aware of Cool Weather Hazards

Awareness is key. Keep an eye out for cold weather warnings and have a plan in place to keep employees safe.

All workers should be educated on what to look for in cold weather work environments in themselves and one another. Monitoring the physical conditions of workers is the first line of defense against cold-related illnesses.

Hypothermia results when someone is exposed to cold temperatures without protection for an extended period. Hypothermia isn't limited to cold and freezing temperatures. It can result from windy conditions, exhaustion, and wet clothing. Signs of hypothermia include shivering, slurred speech or mumbling, shallow breathing, clumsiness, low energy, confusion, and loss of consciousness.

Frostbite is when body tissues freeze. Different from frost nip, when there is a superficial nonfreezing cold injury due to blood vessel constriction, frostbite can lead to permanent tissue damage. It most commonly affects fingers, toes, the nose, cheeks, and ears. Frostbite symptoms include cold, prickly-feeling skin, numbness, hard or waxy-looking skin, and clumsiness.

Have a Plan in Place for Cold Weather Emergencies

Knowing how to respond to cold stress situations can make a huge difference in helping employees. Have emergency blankets and dry layers available. Report any symptoms to supervisors so proper steps can be followed and care administered. Even if someone says they're "fine" or "just tired," reiterate to employees that following an instinct to report or help someone who may be dealing with hypothermia can be a life or death decision.

All physical injuries, for example, from a slip or fall, should be attended to following company protocol. If a person cannot be moved to a warmer location, bring blankets and layers to the victim until help arrives.

Easily Track Jobsite Safety

Using time tracking connected software will help you see if employees are complying with safety regulations and allows you to get everyone back on track to complete projects when weather gets in the way. Also, the ability to track safety effectively gives you insight into unsafe behavior that can be corrected during future projects.

With ViewpointOne connected construction software, you can stay in contact with all your teams and projects while easily following up on jobsite safety by using effective tracking. The ViewpointOne suite brings your projects, people and processes together in a truly collaborative construction management environment, unlike software that solves a single need. To learn more, get in touch with us or connect via Facebook or Twitter.

To learn more about jobsite safety best practices, please watch our previously recorded webinar about leveraging quality and safety for better margins.

Posted By

Andy Holtmann

Andy is Marketing Content & PR Manager at Viewpoint. He has worked in the construction software arena since 2011. Previously, he netted multiple awards as a newspaper and trade media editor.