

THE BIG CHILL TIPS FOR NIPPING WINTER IN THE BUD



Yes, winter is here again in all its wild, white glory – complicating everything we try to do, from walking and driving to work and play.

Working on the construction projects that New Yorkers need becomes considerably more challenging for Laborers in the winter. That means taking extra precautions against the elements by dressing properly and following basic safety procedures.

This issue of LABORSAFE contains tips for keeping healthy and safe this winter, from guarding against frostbite to being aware of medical problems that may increase when temperatures drop.

Getting there

Driving and walking in winter become hazardous as snow and ice create traffic and road problems. Remember that bridge surfaces freeze faster than other roadways and that what may look like a puddle can be water on top of ice, a nasty combination.

- Allow yourself more drive time than usual to avoid haste and bad, impatient decisions.
- Leave more space between your vehicle and those ahead of you. Even if you drive a four-wheel drive vehicle

that gets you going in the snow, it still can't stop any better than a regular car or truck.

- Wear boots with prominent treads, watch where you step and try to avoid ice. Remember that walking can be just as slow and hazardous as driving, especially on icy stairs.

Know your medical history

Winter weather may worsen a number of health problems and conditions. If you have diabetes, for example, you'll need to keep your extremities warm.

Individuals with such respiratory ailments as bronchitis or asthma may have difficulty breathing in cold weather, and the cold also may strain those with heart conditions.

At your annual check-up or other doctor visits, ask your physician about any special precautions you should take before working outdoors, based on your medical history or special conditions and health challenges.

Of course, colds and the flu are more common in winter because we are indoors more, and the viruses that cause these conditions are more easily spread.

DRESS FOR...

Cold weather

SUCCESS



It's important to look and listen for the unexpected and potentially dangerous.



Hypothermia – a drop in overall body temperature that compromises the function of the heart and other organs – is a serious health hazard and can be avoided by dressing properly for low temperatures.

Dress in layers so you can adapt to temperature changes by adding and subtracting clothing items.

Wear synthetics such as polypropylene next to the skin, particularly avoiding cotton, and remember that wool holds its insulation value, even when wet, longer than other fabrics.

Bundle up, yes, but be aware

Being all wrapped up in warm winter clothing is good, but it also means you may become less aware of possible hazards around you.

For example, it's hard to hear as well as usual with a warm hat or liner on under your hard hat. And those who wear glasses know they can easily fog up with condensed water vapor from your breath.

So it's important to look and listen for the unexpected and potentially dangerous.

Other hazards

Winter workspaces also present special hazards, such as icy footing and fumes from heaters used in enclosed spaces.

Colorless, odorless carbon monoxide from such heaters can give you headaches, make you sleepy and ultimately cause asphyxiation. So can the dangerous combination of closed car or truck windows and leaky exhaust systems. So be careful to open a window a bit for ventilation when you take refuge in your vehicle to warm up on the job.

BEAT THE BITE

Cover up for safety

Hands, feet, faces and ears are more vulnerable to frostbite than the rest of your body. Cover these exposed areas carefully to avoid frostbite injury and time lost from the job.

If you have diabetes or other circulatory impairments, you have to be especially careful to keep extremities warm.

When you lose feeling in fingers, toes, ears or nose – i.e., when you become numb there – you're in danger of frostbite. Gradually warm these areas, and seek medical attention.

Once you suffer frostbite the first time, you'll be more susceptible to it ever after, so try to avoid it the first time.



HANDLE WITH CARE

The ins and outs of material supply and handling



Risky business – This Laborer is reaching high overhead to grasp a concrete block, putting him at risk for injury.

Moving heavy materials challenges Laborers with many significant risk factors, requiring special techniques and equipment to provide safety from injury and fatigue.

Laborers often must lift materials

weighing up to 200 pounds from ground level to overhead positions, as well as move 100-pound cement blocks or brick tongs weighing more than 50 pounds.

Laborers on some demolition sites also must wheel around containers of debris weighing as much as 500 pounds.

Heavy loads needn't be hazards. Follow these suggestions to increase the margin of safety for these tough tasks.

- **Use such devices** as hoists, wheel wells, carts or prime movers to handle heavy loads.
- **When moving heavy objects manually:**
 - keep your back straight
 - avoid twisting your body
 - hold the object close to your body, and
 - lift with your legs.

- **Use buckets** to move mortar rather than bending and twisting to move it with shovels.
- **Always wear gloves** to protect hands from hard, rough-surfaced materials.
- **Use two partially loaded brick tongs**

rather than a single full set, which might weigh as much as 50 pounds.

- **Carefully plan** worksite organization and material flow to avoid the need to repalletize heavy loads by hand.
- **Use adjustable-height** work surfaces to work at waist level whenever possible, rather than stooping and straining the lower back.
- **Work in teams** of two or three Laborers to handle debris containers, and remember that pushing these containers is safer and more effective than pulling.



Step to it – When moving heavy materials manually, an elevated platform can help prevent stress and strains from unnecessary bending and twisting.

Heavy loads needn't be hazards if these useful suggestions are used to handle the weight.



HEADS UP FOR WINTER

It takes only a glimpse of a hockey game or ski race to understand the need for head protection during wintertime activities.

Get smart about preventing brain injuries

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) occurs every 21 seconds in the United States today, affecting some 1.5 million Americans each year.

A big problem year round, TBI is any sudden assault to the head that diminishes or alters consciousness and results in impaired cognitive abilities or physical functioning. It can also disturb behavioral or emotional functioning.

TBI causes fatal injuries to 53,000 Americans every year, including 7,000 children, according to the Brain Injury Association of America.

In addition, 5.3 million Americans currently live with disabilities from brain injuries, many requiring extensive medical support and care taking. In fact, traumatic brain injury in the United States costs an estimated \$48.3 billion annually.

Most of us associate TBI with such summertime activities as bicycling or skateboarding, but it takes only a glimpse of a hockey game or ski race to understand the need for head protection during



wintertime activities. Other causes of TBI include motor vehicle crashes and falls.

Many of these injuries are preventable in the same way that protective headgear provides safety from head injury to Laborers on job sites. All family members should wear helmets for snowboarding, skiing and skating just as conscientiously.

GET YOUR HEART PUMPING

Who wants to get into a cold vehicle and drive to the gym to exercise after a day of working in the cold and then enjoying a nice warm dinner?

Many Laborers tend to slacken their workout schedules during the winter, especially those laid off at the end of the traditional construction season. However, it's important to exercise to maintain proper muscle tone and make it easier to return to

full strength for the spring work season.

Try to maintain even a light exercise schedule during the winter, such as walking a mile or two a few times a week. Many people visit shopping malls during bad weather, to have a warm, dry place to walk.

Keep moving, protect your health generally, and ensure you'll be ready for the next construction season.



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