

AT THE END OF THE WORKDAY, EVERYONE GOES HOME SAFE.

Dealing With the Idaho Cold

Toolbox Talk



IDAHO AGC
THE CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION

January is the coldest month on average for the state of Idaho. We experience some of the coldest conditions in the nation during January.

On top of freezing temperatures, there are additional factors that attribute to cold stress on the body. Becoming wet or damp in the cold will increase stress, as well as dressing improperly, or becoming exhausted. Also, if a person has pre-disposing health conditions like hypertension, hypothyroidism, diabetes, or poor physical condition, they are more likely to be at risk.

"[In January] the average low temperatures are in the icy -2°F (-18.9°C) to 22°F (-5.6°C) range, while the average high temperatures are in the cold zone of 26°F (-3.3°C) to 43°F (6.1°C)" (Weather Atlas).

What are they at risk of exactly? There are several risks involved, but common examples are hypothermia (losing body heat faster than it can be replaced), frostbite (freezing of the skin and underlying tissues), and trench foot (when skin tissue begins to die from being wet for long periods of time).

There are four primary strategies to prevent cold stresses from affecting the body.

First is ensuring everyone on the jobsite has training on recognizing

and preventing cold stress injuries and illnesses, proper PPE, and best work practices when working in the cold in crucial.

Second is utilizing engineering controls, such as heaters, to warm back up. Another engineering control would be shielding from the wind, snow, or rain.

Third is to utilize safe work practices. Dehydration is a challenge during the cold. Drinking cold liquids can drop body temperature, or it can freeze, so having warm liquids around is a good practice. It is best to use the buddy system (have each person monitored by another). Breaks in warm areas are recommended to allow each person to warm back up. The body will acclimate as time goes on but protecting by using safe work practices is vital.

Fourth is simply dressing appropriately. OSHA recommends utilizing a layer system of three-layers: an inner layer of wool, silk, or synthetic materials to wick moisture away from the body; a mid-layer of wool or synthetic material for insulation, even when wet; and an outer layer that breaks the wind and is waterproof or water resistant. It is also wise to wear a hat to reduce the

amount of heat lost, along with insulated and waterproof boots. Other articles of clothing that can be utilized are a mask or face covering to cover the nose and mouth and insulated gloves (water resistant would be best).

Incident Profile:

During roof work on a school building on a winter afternoon, a man collapsed. Coworkers rushed over, checked his vitals, and began administering CPR. The paramedics arrived and transported him to the local hospital right away, but unfortunately, the man was pronounced dead upon arrival.

Hypothermia was deemed the cause of death. It was found that he was dressed improperly, had soaking wet tennis shoes on, and had not taken any breaks to warm up or dry off since beginning his day.

Talking Points:

1. Why do you think the victim from the Incident Profile did not use safe work practices?
2. How do my coworkers and I follow safe work practices?
3. What are some things that can be changed to better protect everyone from cold stresses on our jobsite?

