

Hanover County Safety & Risk Focus



Cold Stress

Anyone working in a cold environment may be at risk for cold stress. This could include an indoor workplace like cold storage and garage workshops or an outdoor job in agriculture. Prolonged exposure to cold and/or freezing temperatures while on the job may cause serious health problems such as trench foot, frostbite and hypothermia. In extreme cases, exposure to cold temperatures can lead to death. Risk factors for cold stress include:

- Overexposure to cold temperatures
- Dressing improperly for the weather
- Wet clothing and/or wet skin
- Poor physical conditioning
- Exhaustion
- Health conditions such as high blood pressure, hypothyroidism, diabetes or asthma
- Increase wind speed, and the wind chill effect
- Inadequate training on how to work safely in cold temperatures

Similar to preventing the risk of heat illness impacts in the summer, the prevention of the effects of working in cold weather can place on the body can be greatly reduced by practicing the following tips during the cold weather season:

- Recognize that environmental and workplace conditions may be dangerous.
- Take frequent short breaks in warm dry shelters.
- Schedule work for the warmest part of the day.
- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue.
- Eat warm, high-calorie foods.
- Drink warm, sweet beverages and avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Keep extra clothing handy in case clothes get wet and dress for conditions. Examples include three layers of loose fitting clothing, Insulated coat/jacket, water-resistant if necessary, hat that covers the ears, knit mask to cover face and mouth, Insulated gloves and insulated, waterproof boots with rugged treads for walking on slick surfaces.
- Learn the signs and symptoms of cold-induced illnesses and injuries and what to do to help workers, if needed.
- Use the buddy system – work in pairs so that one worker can recognize danger signs.
- Stay dry in the cold because moisture or dampness, even from sweating, can increase the rate of heat loss from the body.

Cold weather will affect everyone differently, but being prepared to protect yourself against the effects of cold weather no matter its effect on you is your best line of defense! Remember, stay warm, stay hydrated stay safe while working in the cold this fall and winter!

Safety & Risk Quote of the Month:



Safety & Risk Resources & Information:

Additional information & resources on cold weather & cold stress prevention are provided below:

[Cold Stress \(Workplace Safety & Health Topics – NIOSH\)](#)

[Cold Weather Video \(National Safety Council\)](#)

Safety & Risk Fact of the Month:

When most people think of hypothermia, they think of frigid temperatures or blizzard like conditions. In reality, hypothermia occurs most often in the spring and fall, rather than winter.

(Information Source: Environmental Safety & Health, Princeton University, 2022)