



Toolbox Talks

Cold Stress



Anyone working in a cold environment may be at risk for cold stress. This could include an indoor workplace like cold storage or an outdoor job in construction or 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.

Although OSHA does not have a specific standard that covers working in cold environments, under the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) of 1970, employers have a duty to protect workers from recognized hazards, including cold stress hazards, that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm in the workplace.

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

Dressing properly is extremely important to preventing cold stress.

- At least 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
- Insulated and waterproof boots

MORE IMPORTANT TIPS TO PREVENT COLD STRESS:

- Recognize environmental and workplace conditions that 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.
- 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

Safety Topic:	Date/Time:
Facilitator:	Location:

Name	Signature	

