



GBCA SAFETY TOOLBOX TALK

WORKING IN THE COLD

As temperatures dip during the winter months, construction workers face the occupational hazard of exposure to the cold. Workers need to be especially mindful of the weather, its effects on the body, and how to keep warm and safe during these days.

There are 4 conditions that lead to cold related stress injuries such as frostbite and hypothermia. Prepare yourself against these conditions:

- Low temperatures
- High/cool winds
- Dampness
- Cold water

Wear the right types of clothing to fight the elements. Wearing inadequate or wet clothing increases the effects of cold on the body. Wear at least three layers of clothing:

- An outer layer to break the wind and allow some ventilation.
- A middle layer of wool or synthetic fabric to absorb sweat and retain insulation in a damp environment.
- Inner layers of cotton or synthetic weave to allow for proper ventilation.

Be aware that some personal conditions pose a greater hazard in cold weather:

- Taking certain drugs or medications such as alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, can inhibit the body's response to the cold and impair judgment.
- Having a cold or certain diseases, such as diabetes, heart, vascular, and thyroid problems, may make a person more susceptible to the winter elements.

In addition, you should do the following:

- Pay special attention to protecting feet, hands, face, and head. Up to 40 percent of body heat can be lost when the head is exposed.
- Wear insulated footgear to protect against cold and dampness.
- Keep a change of clothing available in case work garments become wet.

Prepare for being stranded in your vehicle:

- 70% of deaths during snow or ice storms occur in vehicles. Carry blankets or sleeping bags, matches, hand warmers, candles, a snow shovel and sandbags, a flashlight, and food such as cereal bars, in case a winter storm strands you in your vehicle.
- Remember to crack a window open to allow in fresh air!