

Cold Weather Occupational Safety and Health

Many regions in the United States are currently dealing with extreme cold weather. Although OSHA does not have a specific standard that covers working in cold environments, employers have a responsibility to provide workers with a place of employment free from recognized hazards, including cold stress, which are causing / likely to cause death or serious physical harm .¹



Employers should train workers on how to prevent and recognize cold stress illnesses and injuries. At a minimum, train workers on:

- How to recognize the symptoms of cold stress, prevent cold stress injuries and illnesses
- The importance of self-monitoring and monitoring coworkers for symptoms
- How to select proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions



Employers must provide personal protective equipment (PPE), for example, fall protection, when required by OSHA standards to protect workers' safety, and health. However, in limited cases specified in the standard 29 CFR 1910.132, there are exceptions to the requirement for employers to provide PPE to workers. For instance, there is no OSHA requirement for employers to provide workers with *ordinary* clothing, such as winter coats, jackets, gloves, parkas, and hats. **Regardless of this, many employers provide their workers with winter weather gear.**

Employers should provide engineering controls. The concept behind engineering controls is that the work environment and the job itself should be designed to eliminate hazards or reduce exposure to hazards. Employers should use these to protect workers from winter weather related hazards. For example, aerial lifts can be used for safely applying de-icing materials to roofs, to protect workers from the hazard of falling.

Employers should use safe work practices. To protect workers from cold weather injuries, illnesses and fatalities, these include:

- Scheduling maintenance and repair jobs for warmer months
- Scheduling jobs that expose workers to the cold weather in the warmer part of the day
- Avoiding exposure to extremely cold temperatures when possible
- Limiting the amount of time spent outdoors on extremely cold days
- Using relief workers to assign extra workers for long, demanding jobs
- Providing warm areas and warm liquids (no alcohol) for use during break periods
- Monitoring the weather conditions during a winter storm, having a reliable means of communicating with workers and being able to stop work when necessary
- Acclimatizing new workers and those returning after time away by allowing more frequent breaks in warm areas, as they build up a tolerance for working in the cold environment

¹ [Section 5\(a\)\(1\) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970](#)