

TOOLBOX TALK: COLD STRESS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody check what you are wearing. Cotton next to the skin, wet gloves, no hat? Then you are going to be worse at your job by ten o'clock, and that is before we talk about frostbite.

The talk

Three layers. A wicking layer next to the skin that is not cotton, an insulating layer in the middle, and a wind and water resistant shell. Cotton holds sweat against you and then you carry a wet layer all day, which is how a cold morning becomes hypothermia in the afternoon.

Wind chill is the number that matters, not the thermometer. Thirty degrees with a twenty mile an hour wind takes exposed skin down fast, and standing on a deck or up on a lift is where the wind actually is.

Wet is worse than cold. Wet gloves, wet boots, snow down a collar, or sweat from working hard in a shell you never opened. Bring a spare set of gloves and socks and change them when they get wet, not at the end of the day.

Know the signs. Frostbite starts as numbness with white or grayish yellow skin that feels firm or waxy, usually fingers, toes, nose and ears. Do not rub it. Get inside, warm it gradually with body heat or warm not hot water, and get medical attention.

Hypothermia starts with uncontrollable shivering, then clumsiness, slurred speech and confusion. When the shivering stops but the person is still cold, it is getting worse, not better. That is a 911 call. Get them into a warm dry place, off wet clothes, into blankets, warm drinks if they are alert.

And the part that causes most winter injuries: ice. Black ice on plywood, frost on steel, snow hiding an opening, a ladder base on ice. Salt or sand the routes, sweep the deck before anybody carries anything across it, and add extra time to everything.

Point at these before anybody starts

- What everybody is wearing next to the skin, and whether any of it is cotton
- Spare gloves, socks and hats in the truck, and who does not have any
- The wind chill for this morning and this afternoon

- Where the warm up area is and how often people are getting to it
- Ice and frost on decks, stairs, ladders, scaffolds and the walking routes
- Anybody who is already shivering, and how long they have been out

The rules that apply

- Layer properly: a non cotton wicking base, an insulating middle layer and a wind and water resistant shell.
- Change out of wet gloves, socks and clothing immediately. Wet clothing pulls heat out of the body far faster than cold air.
- Take scheduled warm up breaks in a heated space, more often as wind chill drops.
- Frostbite: do not rub the area, warm it gradually, get medical attention.
- Hypothermia with confusion or shivering that has stopped is a 911 call. Warm the person and keep them awake and dry.
- Clear, salt or sand every walking route, ladder base and work platform before work starts.

Ask the crew

- Who is working in the wind today, up high or out in the open?
- Who does not have a spare pair of gloves with them right now?
- Where is the ice on this site that somebody is going to find the hard way?

Close with this

Dry layers, warm up breaks, salt on the routes. If somebody stops shivering and starts making no sense, call 911.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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This talk is general safety information for a crew briefing, not legal advice and not a substitute for the training your employees are required to have. Standards are quoted for orientation only. Check the current text of the standard and your own state plan, which may be stricter than the federal rule.