Layer on Your Cold Weather Clothing



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Working outdoors in cold weather is just one of the reasons why people in the oil and gas industry have to be tough.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

But even the toughest people can get into serious trouble in weather conditions that might not seem threatening. For example, people have died of hypothermia – a condition where loss of body heat dangerously lowers the body's core temperature – in outdoor temperatures of 40° F (5° C).

Working in windy, cool or cold conditions, particularly if it is raining, puts people at risk for this life-threatening condition, as does falling into cold water or working up a sweat in cold weather.

Dehydration, smoking and drinking alcohol in cold weather all increase one's risk for suffering hypothermia.

Symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, slurred speech, drowsiness, memory loss and loss of hand co-ordination. Without medical treatment, including taking the victim to a warm place, loss of consciousness and death may occur.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Your best defense against hypothermia is to dress warmly, in layers, so clothing can be removed or added as needed. Remember, too much clothing can lead to sweating, which can set the stage for hypothermia.

Bring along extra clothing to change into if there's any possibility that you will get wet while working. Since much heat loss occurs from the head area, you should wear a hat.

Winter footwear is essential for keeping the feet warm and dry.

Now that you know the symptoms of hypothermia, remember to watch out for them in yourself and in your co-workers.

You should be taking periodic breaks to warm up once temperatures reach – 15° F (-26° C) or cold winds reach 10 miles an hour (16 km/h).

Another cold weather hazard is frostbite, in which the extremities – fingers, toes, ears, cheeks and nose – freeze. The skin turns from red to white and becomes swollen, dry and hard. Frostbite may kill the tissue, and make amputation necessary.

FINAL WORD

If you are working in an isolated area, you should be using a buddy system to monitor each other for hypothermia and other cold weather.