Seasonal Work: Summer Heat, Winter Cold, Shoulder-Season Variability Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Your body has physical limits, and those limits shift with temperature, humidity, wind, and how well hydrated you are going into the shift. Weather-related illness and injury do not always announce themselves with obvious warning signs. Heat stroke can become life-threatening within minutes of onset. Hypothermia impairs your judgment before you even realize something is wrong. Every season brings real hazards that need active management, not just awareness.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Each season brings its own specific set of risks for outdoor and mixed workers. Here is what to watch for throughout the year.

Summer

- Heat exhaustion: heavy sweating, pale or flushed skin, dizziness, nausea, and weakness. This is your body’s early warning signal
- Heat stroke: hot and dry skin, confusion, rapid heartbeat, possible loss of consciousness. This is a medical emergency requiring immediate action
- Dehydration: starts reducing concentration and physical performance well before you actually feel thirsty
- Sunburn and UV exposure during extended outdoor shifts, even on overcast or partly cloudy days

Winter

- Frostbite: can develop above freezing when wind chill and wet conditions are combined, beginning in fingers, toes, ears, and nose
- Hypothermia: impairs judgment and coordination before the person affected realizes what is happening to them
- Loss of grip strength and hand dexterity from cold, increasing the chance of dropping tools or missing handholds
- Ice and compacted snow turning every walking surface into a slip hazard, including paths that looked clear earlier in the shift

Shoulder Seasons (Spring and Fall)

- Workers who dress for a cool morning are frequently underprepared when afternoon temperatures climb significantly
- Unexpected cold fronts after a stretch of mild weather catch workers wearing the wrong gear for the conditions
- Rain and wet ground in these seasons add slip hazards on top of the existing temperature unpredictability

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Seasonal hazards are predictable. That means they are also preventable, as long as you prepare before your shift and pay attention to how your body is responding while you work.

In the Heat: Hydrate Before You Feel Thirsty

Thirst is a late signal. By the time you feel it, you are already mildly dehydrated, and your performance has already started to drop. Drink small amounts of water consistently throughout your shift rather than large amounts all at once. In extreme heat, electrolyte drinks help replace minerals you lose through heavy sweating. Avoid caffeine and alcohol before or during hot shifts, as both accelerate fluid loss significantly.

Take Proper Rest Breaks in the Heat

When temperatures are high, rest breaks are not optional. Use them to sit in shade or a cooled area and let your core temperature come down before going back out.

If Someone Shows Signs of Heat Stroke, Act Immediately

- Move the person to a cool, shaded, or air-conditioned area right away, do not wait to see if they improve on their own
- Apply cold water or ice packs to the neck, armpits, and groin where blood vessels are close to the surface
- Loosen or remove any excess clothing to help the body release heat
- Call for emergency help immediately, heat stroke is a life-threatening emergency that cannot wait

In the Cold: Layer Correctly and Stay Dry

- Moisture-wicking base layer to move sweat away from your skin so it does not chill you from the inside out
- Insulating mid-layer, such as fleece or down, to trap and hold your body heat effectively throughout the shift
- Windproof and waterproof outer layer to block wind chill and keep rain or snow from soaking through
- Replace any wet clothing as soon as possible, because wet fabric loses nearly all of its insulating ability the moment it gets saturated

Watch for Hypothermia in Your Crew

One of the most dangerous things about hypothermia is that it reduces a person’s ability to recognize they are in trouble. Someone who is becoming hypothermic

may seem unusually tired, confused, clumsy, or start slurring their words, and they will often insist they feel fine. If you notice any of these signs in a coworker during cold weather, treat it as a medical situation and get them to warmth and help right away.

For Shoulder Seasons: Check the Full Day’s Forecast

Before your shift, check the weather forecast for the entire day, not just the temperature when you wake up. Shoulder season swings can be significant, and dressing in removable layers gives you the flexibility to adapt as conditions change without stopping work. A light shell in your bag in the morning and a spare layer for the afternoon takes almost no extra effort and prevents being caught unprepared.

FINAL WORD

Your body works hard for you every shift. Give it the right clothing, enough water, and proper breaks, and it can handle almost any season safely. Ignore those basics and even a mild day can turn into a medical emergency.