Seven Safety Tips for Working in Winter



When discussing winter hazards in the workplace, driving in treacherous conditions is often the first thing mentioned. But there are several other winter workplace hazards that supervisors need to watch out for and guard against.

1. **Cold stress:** workers are at risk for hypothermia and frostbite while working outside in cold weather. They need to be given periodic warm-up breaks and be encouraged to dress in layers that can be added as required. Workers should be wearing gloves, hats and warm footwear with good tread.
2. **Carbon monoxide hazards:** When workers are chilled to the bone after working outdoors, the only thing they may think of is getting warm. But if they are operating fuel-powered heaters indoors without ventilation, they could suffer fatal carbon monoxide poisoning. Proper ventilation is also vital when any fuel-powered vehicles such as forklifts are being operated indoors. There are stories every winter about workers in buildings suffering carbon monoxide poisoning because bay doors have been shut to keep heat in.
3. **Slips and falls:** Nearly everyone has had the jarring feeling of landing hard on his or her back as a result of slipping on ice. So it’s obvious that walking surfaces such as sidewalks need to be kept shoveled and sprinkled with salt or de-icing solutions. But workers are at even greater danger when working at heights on roofs, ladders or walkways. Remind your workers to always check ladders for ice on rungs before using them. And workers need to wear appropriate footwear. Anti-slip mats should be installed at building entrances to help prevent slips on wet floors from snow tracked inside.
4. **Potential roof collapses:** If snow on a roof accumulates to more than one foot (30 centimeters), there is the potential for a roof collapse – particularly so if the snow is wet and heavy. Therefore, excessive accumulations of snow must be removed. It is safest to not be on a roof while removing snow from it. Use of an aerial lift for this task is recommended. Warning signs of an unstable roof include the appearance of cracks on interior walls or ceilings, interior doors that jam, or building noises such as creaks or groans. If these warning signs become apparent, the building should be evacuated immediately and checked by an engineer before re-entry is permitted.
5. **Icicles and snow-laden branches:** Workers walking under roof eaves or near trees on company property are at risk for being struck by falling icicles

or branches that snap under a snow load. Icicles should be removed from roof edges and workers should be warned to stay clear of snow-laden trees

6. **Wind hazards:** In addition to increasing a worker’s risk for developing hypothermia, wind also poses a hazard to people who are working at heights, especially if surfaces are slippery. Workers carrying heavy objects such as sheets of plywood, or working near the edge of a roof without proper fall protection, are at risk for being blown over a roof’s edge.
7. **Fire hazards:** Ensure that workers keep heaters and torches well away from combustible materials, and that portable heaters are not left on when workers leave for the day.

When discussing workplace hazards that can crop up during the winter months, driving in treacherous conditions is often the first thing people mention. We covered that topic in the November 2015 editions of Safe Supervisor and Safety Smart, but there are several other winter hazards that supervisors need to address with their workers.