COLD WEATHER HAZARDS

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Dealing with snow and ice removal are the prime hazards for custodian or maintenance workers in winter weather. Also, for those people who get caught up in snow removal on an hoc basis. Staying safe by using sound work practices in winter conditions, has its challenges.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Workers and all custodian workers working outside have to reminded of the risk and dangers inherent in their work. Hypothermia a dangerous lowering of the body's core temperature can occur if proper dress procedures are not observed. One has heard of stories of people suffering heart attacks and dying when shoveling snow. There are the usual back injuries because of ill-advised shoveling techniques.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

What all winters custodians and maintenance workers need to know:

- Staying warm and dry are important for preventing hypothermia. Dress in layers of clothing, so you can remove outerwear if you get too warm. Keep dry by using waterproof footwear and clothing, and keep a change of socks and gloves handy in case yours get wet. In severely cold weather, protect your hands, toes and cheeks from freezing which will cause the tissue damage known as frostbite.
- Take it easy when you shovel snow by hand because of the possibilities of back injury and heart attack. Push, rather than lift, snow when possible. If the snow is wet and heavy, take smaller loads. Take frequent breaks, keep from getting too warm and drink water often to replace fluid and minerals lost by sweating.

Another important aspect of winter work is dealing with snow removal equipment.

- Check over equipment such as a snowblower before use to make sure it is functioning properly and safety guards are in place. Don't run gasoline-powered equipment indoors because of the danger of carbon monoxide exposure. Do a circle check of plows and other mobile equipment to look for problems and obstructions?
- Keep people away from the area where you start or operate the machine. Shift into neutral and make sure all clutches are disengaged before starting the motor.
- Walk slowly and carefully so you don't slip, and keep a firm hold on the machine. If you try to remove snow too quickly, you'll overload the machine. Stay away from the discharge opening to prevent entanglement or being struck by objects propelled by the blades. Do not use a snow thrower on steep slopes. Make sure you don't hit obstructions such as curbs or tree roots.
- Never put your hand in any part of the equipment while the machine is running. First turn off the engine, wait for all moving parts to stop and disconnect the spark plug wire so the machine can't accidentally start up. Use a tool, never your fingers, to remove any snow or ice buildup.

FINAL WORD

Before using heating devices such as torches for thawing frozen utilities make sure you understand and observe all safety precautions. Learn your employer's procedures for winter emergencies such as storms and power outages. You might have to assume extra duties in these situations but protect your own safety and health while helping others.

QUIZ

1. **Hypothermic is defined as a dangerous lowering of the body's temperature that can have serious consequences.**
   - True
   - False

2. **Frost bite occurs in severely cold weather when your hands, toes and cheeks can freeze.**
   - True
   - False

3. **It is ok to lift heavy wet snow rather than push snow when shoveling.**
   - True
   - False

4. **In cases of emergency, it is safe to use a gasoline – powered equipment indoors.**
   - True
   - False

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

The regular maintenance worker has called in sick. You are a replacement worker who has had limited experience using snow removal equipment. There has been a heavy snowfall and your boss is demanding you use the snow removal equipment because customers will be arriving soon.
What would you do?

BEFORE THE TALK - TIPS

Before the Meeting Preparation Tips:

- Pass around the attendance sheets.

Be prepared to discuss:

- Safe work practices and policies passed around pertaining to working outside in winter and encountering cold weather hazards and concerns.
- Reporting procedures related to injuries suffered in winter conditions.

Other:

- If your custodial crew works inside only, use this information to remind them of safety off the job and on the drive to work in the winter.
- A custodial job can start early in the morning in winter weather for plowing snow out of driveways and parking lots, making sidewalks safe for pedestrians, operating heating systems and dealing with frozen pipes before the work day starts for the rest of the staff. Those early hours can lead to dangerous fatigue. Talk to your workers about getting enough sleep and coping safely with early shifts.
- Winter's long hours of darkness mean additional driving hazards on the commute to the work site and in operating snow removal equipment.
    - Remind your workers of safety behind the wheel.

AFTER THE TALK- *CHECKLIST*

PROVIDED FOLLOW-UP TO WORKERS THAT DID

POORLY ON THE QUIZ
NAME: _____
_____
DATE: _____

OBSERVED WORKERS
TASK(S): _____
_____
DATE: _____

REFRESHER TRAINING
TOPIC(S): _____
_____
DATE: _____

OTHER (DESCRIBE): _____
MEETING DATE: _____
LOCATION: _____

NOTES

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ANSWERS:

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. False

ATTENDANCE

INSTRUCTOR: _____ **DATE:** _____

SAFETY TALK: _____