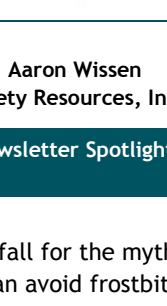


Winter Weather

January 2011

Winter can be a beautiful season, but the severe storms and cold weather can present some dangerous conditions. Training and preparation ahead of time for common winter problems will help make the winter season safer.



When you think about the work hazards coupled with winter weather, most that come to mind should be rather apparent. We all know that we can slip and fall on ice or that snow and ice can fall off of roofs or suspended structures. Hypothermia and frost bite are frequently forgotten hazards, which if not identified early, can potentially lead to serious situations.

The earliest stage of hypothermia is classified as having a core body temperature of 95° F. It most often occurs because of prolonged exposure to cold weather. Inadequate clothing for the conditions may not provide enough insulation for the body to prevent heat loss. Since hypothermia develops gradually, and since it affects thinking and reasoning, it may go unnoticed.

Initial signs that hypothermia might be setting in are hunger, nausea, and shivering. The body will shiver to increase muscle activity that will promote heat formation. As the body temperature drops, hunger and nausea will give way to apathy, confusion, slurred speech and eventually a loss of consciousness. In the most serious cases, the affected person will lie down, fall asleep and die.

A hypothermic individual should be removed from the cold and placed in a warm shelter away from the wind. Any wet clothing should be removed immediately and replaced by dry, warm clothes or blankets. The individuals breathing should also be monitored, and if it becomes dangerously slow or stops, CPR should be initiated.

Frostbite is simply identified when the skin quite literally becomes frozen. Although any area of the body is susceptible to frostbite, fingers, toes, ears and the nose are the most at risk. Beyond the discomfort associated with frostbite, it can cause permanent damage to the skin, and in the most severe cases, can even lead to the loss of limbs and appendages.

A person with early signs of frostbite may notice fingers or toes turning bright red. As blood gets pulled from the extremities, small patches of white skin will begin to develop. That's because the moisture directly below the skin is freezing. Immediate actions should be taken before the effects become any worse. Move the individual into a warmer area and allow the affected area to return to its normal temperature gradually. Running warm water or rubbing the frostbitten area can actually make the damage worse. The affected skin layer will die, peel off like a scab, and leave a "pockmark." The only safe solution is to allow the skin temperature to rise gradually.

Don't fall for the myth that you can avoid frostbite or hypothermia by developing a tolerance for the cold. Humidity and wind play major factors in the likelihood of developing these conditions, and what may not seem like dangerous conditions could fool you. When kids that are playing in the snow become uncomfortably cold, they head inside to warm up before going back out. Hardworking adults would be wise to follow their lead, instead of convincing themselves that they can manage to work for 15 or 30 more minutes.

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Newsletter Spotlight

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