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## **Keeping workers safe in hazardous winter conditions**

The bite of winter is fast approaching, with some areas already covered in frosty white. While many workers will be earning a living indoors, plenty of people will be working outside in the coming months, often in bitter cold. Employers should be aware of the dangers, and plan accordingly.

The DOL provides four things every employer should know in the winter:

### **1. What do I need to know about shoveling snow?**

Shoveling snow can be a strenuous activity, particularly because cold weather can be taxing on the body, and can create the potential for exhaustion, dehydration, back injuries, or heart attacks.

- Take frequent breaks,
- Drink plenty of fluids (while avoiding ones with caffeine or alcohol),
- Warm-up before starting,
- Scoop small amounts of snow at a time,
- Push the snow instead of lifting where possible, and
- Use proper form if lifting is necessary: keep the back straight and lift with the legs.

### **2. How do you walk safely on snow and ice?**

Walking on snow and ice puts workers at an increased risk of slips and falls.

- Where appropriate, clear walking surfaces of snow and ice and use salt or its equivalent.
- Proper footwear is essential — insulated boots with good rubber treads are a must for walking during or after a winter storm.
- When walking on an icy or snow-covered walkway, take short steps and walk at a slower pace so you can react quickly to a change in traction.
- If the sidewalk is not cleared and you have to walk in the street, walk against the traffic and as close to the curb as you can.
- Look out for vehicles which may have lost traction and are slipping towards you. Be aware that vehicles might have trouble stopping at crosswalks or traffic signals.
- At night, wear bright clothing or reflective gear — dark clothing will make it hard for drivers to see you.
- During the daytime, wear sunglasses to help you see better and avoid hazards.



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### **3. What should I know if there's snow on the roof?**

- Use standard protections when working at heights and look out for unexpected hazards due to the weather.
- Employers should provide and ensure the proper use of fall protection and ladders.
- Use caution around surfaces that have been weighed down by snow, as they may collapse.

### **4. What if there's no snow?**

- Even if there is no snow, working in the cold weather increases the risk of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that causes freezing in the deep layers of skin and tissue. Frostbite can cause permanent damage. It is recognizable by a loss of feeling and a waxy-white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, nose, or ear lobes.
- Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature drops to less than 95°F. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.