

Cold Exposure

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED:

There are five basic safety tips that apply to the entire heavy construction industry. If you practice these five tips, you could make a difference.

- KNOW YOUR JOB
- BE ALERT
- EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED
- USE GOOD JUDGEMENT
- ALWAYS THINK SAFETY

These Tool Box Talks have been designed to include all of the information your company should be able to include in a five minute session. MITA suggests that you document this activity with the sign-in sheet that has been provided and keep it on file for future reference.

Construction activity goes on regardless of weather conditions. The chances of sustaining injury during extreme cold conditions are dramatically increased unless the proper precautions are taken. The following list should assist you in staying off the cold.

- Wear the proper clothing and bring a change of clothes if necessary, i.e. extra socks, another pair of boots or gloves.
- Avoid smoking, chewing tobacco, or drinking alcohol; they all hamper proper blood circulation.
- A good night's sleep greatly enhances your body's ability to cope with the elements.
- Good nutrition and exercise will also dramatically enhance your body's ability to cope with the cold.
- Drinking plenty of water will aid in proper blood circulation and prevent dehydration.

The two most common disorders associated with the cold are hypothermia and frostbite. A break down of the cause, symptom, and treatment of these disorders are as follows:

Hypothermia - A decrease in body temperature below 95°.

Signs / Symptoms:

Uncontrolled shivering, blushed color around the lips, disorientation, loss of dexterity, weakness, semiconsciousness and/or collapse and even death.

Treatment:

- Remove victim from source of cold.
- Remove wet clothing.
- Warm with dry blankets.
- Seek medical attention.
- Warm fluids if victim is conscious.
- Limit movement in extreme cases.
- No hot or warm baths.

Frostbite - Tissue death caused by cold temperatures. Most commonly affected areas are the fingers, hands, toes, feet, face and ears.

Signs / Symptoms:

- The early sign is redness to the affected area.
- The late sign is pale waxy colored skin that may be hard and numb.
- In extreme cases, the affected area may turn dark blue or black.

Treatment:

- Remove victim from source of cold.
- Provide warm dry environment.
- Warm, not hot water to affected area.
- Avoid fires or stoves to rewarm.
- Do not rub areas of extreme frostbite because it could cause further damage.

When it comes right down to it, only you can take care of yourself when it comes to cold exposure. Surviving the elements takes pre-planning. If you suspect you are becoming a victim of frostbite or hypothermia, take swift corrective action.