

Winter safety: Wrap up and stay warm



Incident notification



Alert



Information



Toolbox talk



Why are we doing this talk?

NOTE: The content in this tool box talk is based on information from the RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport union) document 'Thermal comfort in cold weather' www.rmt.org.uk

Introduction

There isn't a legal minimum of clothing for working outdoors during winter. However, employers are legally required to assess the health and safety risks of any work activity. There should be a thermal risk assessment for outdoor activities.

How can it affect us?

Health risks

There are a variety of health risks associated with being cold for long periods of time including:

- Frostbite
- Hypothermia
- Chilblains
- Injuries as a result of freezing conditions

When it's cold, accidents are more likely. This is because of the effect of cold on the body. Cold working conditions can result in reduced strength and mental alertness and stiffened joints.

How the cold affects people

This varies from person to person. In general, people who are in good physical health are less susceptible to cold injuries than someone who is not. Older people are more susceptible to the cold.

These things can increase the risk of cold-related injuries:

- Injuries resulting in blood loss or reduced blood flow
- Fatigue
- Respiratory diseases such as asthma or bronchitis
- Drinking alcohol or smoking

What do we need to do?

Dress warm, stay warm

Staying warm is the most important thing to do when either going out, or working in, the cold. This is achieved by dressing and eating correctly and factoring in the individual's body structure.

We are all different sizes and shapes. We all have a different surface to volume ratio, which affects how much heat we lose. This is because the layer of fat under the skin provides a barrier for heat retention. So, larger people can retain heat better but only if wearing the correct clothing.

Clothing should be worn in layers. Multiple layers are much better at providing insulation than thick single layers of clothing. This is because the air between the layers of clothing provides extra insulation.

The inner layer should be able to "breathe". This helps to keep people dry by taking moisture away from the body. Thermal underwear is made from polyester or polypropylene and is excellent for this purpose.



Almost half of the body's heat is lost through the head and hands so remember to wear a woolly hat and gloves when going out. If you are working on site a good hard hat liner is recommended. Do not wear a woolly hat under a hard hat as it will reduce the level of protection.

Fuel for the day

Once we have the correct clothing we now need to ensure that we take adequate breaks in areas where heating and hot drinks are provided. This will promote our body's recovery quicker back to its natural state.

Try to eat foods which are high in carbohydrates and fats as these can help with maintaining the body's functionality on producing heat.

Q&A What did we understand?

1. Is drinking coffee good for you if you're going out in the snow?
 - a) Yes – correct answer
 - b) No

2. What will you be warmer in?
 - a) One layer of thick clothing
 - b) Many layers of thinner clothing – correct answer