

Cold Stress: Stay Dry, Watch Each Other

COMPANY

PROJECT

DATE

PRESENTED BY

Outdoor construction work in cold, wet, and windy weather can take heat from your body faster than you can replace it. Wet clothing, including clothing damp from sweat, makes that heat loss worse. Cold stress can cause serious injury or death, and a worker with hypothermia may not recognize the danger.

Plan for Cold, Wind, and Wet Clothing

- Check the weather and wind chill before outdoor work, and watch for changes during the day. Wind chill describes how cold air and wind together increase heat loss from your body.
- Choose warm layers, gloves, and boots suited to cold, wet, and windy conditions. Check that your clothing is dry before starting, and have dry replacements available if clothing gets wet.
- Take warm-up breaks to get out of the cold and check how you feel. Tell the foreman when the work or weather makes it hard to stay warm and dry.
- Pay attention to wet gloves, socks, and boots, not just your jacket. Feet kept cold and wet can develop trench foot, an injury that can happen without freezing temperatures.

Watch Your Partner and Speak Up

- Check on each other during outdoor tasks, especially workers new to the cold or returning after time away. Do not assume someone is safe just because they keep working.
- Uncontrollable shivering is an early warning sign of hypothermia, when the body becomes dangerously cold. Don't ignore it. Stop the task and report it; don't tell someone to work through it.
- Confusion, slurred speech, and loss of coordination are serious warning signs. Slow breathing or unconsciousness means the worker needs urgent medical attention, not another attempt to finish the task.
- Report suspected frostbite or other cold injury promptly, even if you are unsure what it is. Stop the exposure and get help rather than waiting for the worker to diagnose the problem.

Get Help and Protect the Worker

- Know how to call for emergency medical help and how to guide responders to the work area. OSHA requires the employer to arrange, before the project starts, for prompt medical attention in case of serious injury.
- For suspected hypothermia, get the worker out of the cold while help is coming. Remove wet clothing and replace it with dry clothing.
- Wrap the whole body, including the head and neck, in layers of blankets and a barrier such as a tarp or garbage bag. Don't cover the face. If a trained first-aid person is on site, get them to help.
- Know where the first-aid supplies are kept and keep the way to them clear. OSHA requires first-aid supplies to be easy to reach, kept in a weatherproof container, and checked by the employer before each job and at least weekly on the job.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

While moving materials outdoors, your partner's gloves are soaked and their shivering becomes uncontrollable. They say they can finish the load, but their speech sounds slurred. What would you stop, who would you contact, and how would you protect them while help arrives?

Questions for the crew

1. Why do wind and wet clothing make cold exposure more dangerous?
2. Which warning signs mean we should stop work and get help?
3. Where are our warm-up area, dry clothing, and first-aid supplies?
4. How will we contact medical help and guide responders here?

Stay warm and dry, watch each other, and stop for cold-stress warning signs before someone cannot help themselves.

Sources: OSHA cold stress guidance, Winter Weather: Cold Stress; 29 CFR 1926.50, Medical services and first aid

Drafted with AI for review by a competent person. Clever Rook writes from the official regulation text it cites, but it doesn't know your site. Check it against your conditions and your company's safety program before use. Not legal advice.

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REVIEWED BY (COMPETENT PERSON)

REVIEW DATE

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