

5 Winter Weather Hazards & How to Guard Against Them



How to ensure worker safety and manage liability risks during the winter.

Cold weather, ice and snow creates a number of safety and liability management challenges for OHS coordinators. Ensuring that your organization is prepared for winter hazards and risks should be an integral part of your larger emergency response planning and procedures. Here are 5 key hazards and what you can do to manage them. Go to the OHS Insider website for a Checklist you can use to carry out a pre-winter safety inspection.

1. Slips, Trips & Falls

Problem: Slips, trips and falls (STFs) are the most common incident resulting in loss-time injuries. Of course, winter is peak season for STF injuries. To make matters worse, your company can be liable not only for worker STF injuries but those suffered by visitors and even members of the general public at your site who aren't subject to workers comp bars and can sue under premises liability laws.

Solution: While STF prevention is a year-round priority, it requires extra efforts in the winter. The primary objective: Keep entries, walkways, parking lots and other common areas over which people walk free of snow and ice.

2. Other Health & Safety Hazards to Workers

Problem: Working in snow, ice and cold conditions also exposes workers to other dangers that you must address.

Solution: You should have OHS policies and procedures covering:

- Proper PPE and clothing for cold weather work;
- Guarding against cold stress hazards;
- Musculoskeletal injuries that workers are apt to suffer when removing or working in snow and ice;
- Fall protection for those working on roofs or elevated surfaces during snowy conditions; and

- WHMIS information and training on the hazards posed by hazardous products that workers may use while removing snow and ice.

3. Snow & Ice Removal Hazards

Problem: You must make arrangements to ensure that snow and ice is immediately and safely cleared away after storms and bouts of freezing weather.

Solution: If you do snow removal in-house, ensure that:

- Workers charged with snow removal duties receive proper training on how and where to remove snow and ice without creating a danger to themselves or others;
- Workers use the right PPE and protective clothing for snow removal; and
- You have adequate snow removal equipment and supplies readily available.

If you hire an outside snow removal contractor, make sure you sign a written contract that:

- Clearly spells out the contractor's snow removal duties, which should be triggered automatically based on precipitation levels;
- Requires the contractor to carry minimum insurance and name you as an additional insured; and
- Requires the contractor to 'indemnify' you, that is, cover any losses you suffer as a result of how it performs under the contract.

4. Hazards to Buildings & Building Systems

Problem: Snow accumulation and freezing temperatures create the risk of roof collapse and freezing pipes. The former occur when the weight of the snow and ice load is greater than what the building was structurally designed to handle; pipes burst when the fluid inside turns to ice, causing it to expand and increase the pressure on the inner pipe walls. breakage.

Solution: Carry out pre-winter inspection and winter monitoring to guard against cold weather hazards to your building's outer shell/structure and systems/equipment, including those for:

- Fire suppression and sprinklers;
- Heating, ventilating and air conditioning; and
- Water supply.

5. Fleet & Vehicle Hazards

Problem: Hazardous road conditions caused by winter weather often create traffic delays, closed roadways and vehicular accidents. Wet and slippery road conditions increase stopping distances and reduce traction and visibility. In addition to your workers' health and safety, these accidents can adversely impact your auto insurance and workers comp rates.

Solution: Train workers how to drive safely in winter conditions, even if that's not their primary job function. Also ensure that workers inspect their vehicles to ensure they're properly winterized and safe to operate in the snow and ice.