

Answer 9 Questions Before Letting Workers Clear Snow from Roofs



During the winter, snow and ice can build up on the roofs of your facilities. Their weight can damage the roof's structure and supports, and even lead to collapses.

So it's important that you clear snow and ice from your roofs. But doing so can endanger workers. For example, without proper equipment and PPE, workers can fall off the roof. And snow may hide any hazardous openings, such as skylights.

Example: A 43-year-old worker at a manufacturing plant in Wisconsin volunteered to clear snow from a flat section of the plant's roof. He stepped on an unguarded skylight that was buried in the snow and fell to the concrete floor 14 feet below. He died of brain, neck and chest injuries.

A hazard alert from OSHA recommends that you plan ahead by thinking about what will be needed to safely remove snow from roofs or other elevated surfaces and answering these nine questions:

1. Can snow be removed without workers going onto the roof'
2. Are there any hazards on the roof that might become hidden by the snow and need to be marked so that workers can see them (skylights, roof drains, vents, etc.)'
3. How should the snow be removed, based on the building's layout, to prevent unbalanced loading'
4. What are the maximum load limits of the roof and how do they compare with the estimated total weight of snow, snow-removal equipment and workers on the roof'
5. What tools, equipment, protective devices, clothing and footwear will workers need'
6. What type of fall protection will be used to protect workers on roofs and other elevated surfaces'
7. What training will workers need to work safely'
8. How will mechanized snow removal equipment be safely elevated to the roof'
9. How will you protect people on the ground from snow and ice falling off the roof during removal operations'