

Transitioning from Heat to Cold: Managing Workplace Wellness and Safety



For OHS managers and HR directors, seasonal transitions present unique challenges. As summer winds down, workers may still be at risk of heat stress while simultaneously preparing for colder weather ahead. This shift can affect physical wellness, productivity, and compliance with health and safety regulations. A well-planned transition strategy ensures employees stay safe, comfortable, and equipped year-round.

1. Balancing Heat Stress and Cold Stress

Late summer and early fall create an overlap in risks: workers may experience heat stress on hot afternoons while also encountering early morning cold stress. These fluctuating temperatures strain the body, particularly for employees performing strenuous tasks. OHS managers must monitor conditions daily, encourage hydration, and provide both cooling stations and warming shelters as needed. In Canada, CSA Z1004-12 and CSA Z94.1 provide guidance on thermal comfort and PPE adjustments, while the US OSHA Technical Manual (Section 3 Chapter 4) covers heat and cold stress guidelines.

2. The Pressure of Deadlines and Rushing

Work

Summer's end often coincides with project deadlines. Construction crews and trades workers may rush to finish paving, roofing, or exterior builds before weather shifts. Rushing increases accident risk—slips, trips, falls, and machinery incidents rise when safety is compromised for speed. Supervisors should reinforce safe pacing, schedule additional shifts if needed, and avoid cutting corners on PPE use.

3. PPE Switchover: From Hot to Cold

A critical aspect of seasonal safety is the switchover in personal protective equipment (PPE). In warm months, workers rely on breathable, moisture-wicking gear, lighter helmets, and cooling vests. As temperatures drop, PPE must shift to insulated gloves, thermal base layers, windproof jackets, and traction footwear for icy conditions. Transition items like removable liners, adjustable helmets, and layered clothing help workers adapt to unpredictable conditions in September and October. CSA Z96-15 and CSA Z195-14 are Canadian guidelines that outline seasonal adjustments for visibility and slip resistance, while OSHA 1910 Subpart 1 is the US equivalent, outlining the PPE appropriate to specific environmental hazards, including cold exposure.

4. Transition Gear for Construction, Trades, and Factories

- **Construction & Trades:** Transition gloves with removable liners, reflective insulated vests, weatherproof boots with slip-resistant soles, and hard hat liners that fit under helmets.
- **Factories & Warehouses:** Anti-slip mats for entryways, insulated safety shoes, and layered uniforms that allow

flexibility for changing indoor/outdoor duties.

- **All Sectors:** High-visibility outerwear for shorter daylight hours and proper storage areas for both summer and winter PPE to avoid damage or contamination.

5. Closing a Worksite for Winter

Not all worksites continue operations through the cold months. For seasonal outdoor projects, proper closure includes securing unfinished structures, draining water lines, protecting equipment from freezing, and ensuring hazardous materials are stored in climate-safe environments. Documentation should confirm all shutdown steps are complete, with signage placed for any hazards left on-site. Canadian laws – specifically CSA Z1002-12 – encourage hazard assessment before worksite closure, while US laws like OSHA 1926.250 provide standards for safe storage and winterization.

6. Outdoor Work That Continues in Winter

While some projects pause, outdoor trades such as utility maintenance, snow removal, pipeline inspection, and certain infrastructure repairs continue. These tasks differ from summer work, often requiring slower paces, de-icing procedures, and more frequent rest breaks to combat cold stress. Tool handling also becomes more difficult in gloves, necessitating specialized PPE designed for dexterity in cold environments. CSA Z94.3-15 emphasizes fog-resistant designs for Canadian workers in cold weather, while OSHA Winter Weather Guidance provides best practices for US workers performing snow removal, roadway work, and emergency response tasks.

7. The Challenges of Transition Months

September and October bring unpredictable weather patterns—heat waves, sudden rainstorms, or early snow. This unpredictability challenges scheduling and resource allocation. Managers should maintain flexible rosters, communicate frequently with crews, and provide modular PPE that can be adjusted daily. Weather monitoring systems and contingency plans for abrupt shutdowns help prevent injuries and lost productivity.

8. Embedding Seasonal Safety into Annual Practice

By treating seasonal transitions as part of the annual safety cycle, employers can normalize preparation, reduce risks, and improve compliance. Annual refresher training, inventory checks of both summer and winter PPE, and proactive wellness programs keep workers healthy and engaged year after year.

Annual Transition Checklist: Warm-to-Cold Weather Safety

- Monitor weather forecasts daily for sudden changes.
- Continue hydration and heat stress precautions until sustained cool weather.
- Provide warming stations or shelters for cold mornings/evenings.
- Swap out PPE: cooling gear → insulated gloves, liners, jackets, boots.
- Ensure high-visibility reflective outerwear for shorter daylight hours.
- Inspect and prepare slip-resistant footwear and traction aids.
- Close down seasonal worksites: secure structures, drain water, store equipment.
- Train crews on cold stress recognition and safe work

pacing.

- Adjust schedules to avoid rushing and overexertion during deadlines.
- Review and restock PPE inventories before full winter sets in.