

SAFETY BRIEFING - WORKING IN WINTER CONDITIONS

Introduction

Extreme weather brings with it several health and safety issues, not all of them obvious. Employers rely on their staff to work carefully in such conditions, not take unnecessary risks and raise concerns promptly with managers.

Hazards

- Ice and snow building up.
- Wet floors.
- Snow and ice falling from roofs.
- Manual handling and lone working associated with gritting and snow clearing.
- Poor road conditions and visibility.
- Hypothermia.
- Reduced staff numbers.
- Burst water pipes and damaged gas pipes.

Risk level

High

Medium

Low

- Ice can lead to slipping accidents. Broken bones are more common in icy conditions.
- Ice, heavy rain storms and poor visibility also increases the risk of vehicle accidents.
- When snow and rain is brought into the entrance of a building hard floors become slippery.
- Pedestrians can be struck by falling snow and ice in severe conditions.
- Those sent out to clear snow and ice have to carry out strenuous manual work which in cold conditions can lead to strains and sprains. They are also at risk of falling, possibly in darkness and alone, so that there is no ready access to help.
- Emergency exits, and external routes can be obstructed or made hazardous by snow/ice.
- Those working outdoors, or who get trapped in vehicles, are at risk of hypothermia.
- When staff are low in number, normal systems of work may become unsafe and emergency procedures may become inoperable.
- Winter weather causes damage to external paths.
- Fracturing of water and gas pipes can lead to flooding, gas release and explosion. Flooding introduces additional dangers from electricity.

Control measures

- Act with due caution – weigh up whether a job is worth the risk if weather conditions are severe. Raise concerns with management.
- If gritting out of hours or travelling in freezing temperatures, have a mobile phone or radio with you. Make sure someone will check on you if you do not log in by a pre-set time.
- Report any issues such as wet floors, burst pipes, uneven paths, ice, blocked exits, problems caused by low staffing numbers etc. to the manager responsible for the premises (mats and floor drying should be used to limit wet floor problems).
- Wear a high visibility vest when clearing snow and ice and have one in your vehicle when travelling.
- If available, use shoe add-ons which increase grip when working on icy surfaces. In any case wear flat

footwear with a good grip.

- Dress for the conditions. Layers are warmer and more practical than thick heavy sweaters etc.
- Warm up your muscles before carrying out heavy work in cold conditions.
- Before setting out on a winter journey, make sure your vehicle is equipped with emergency items, e.g. spare warm clothing, wet weather clothing, shovel, food, hot drink, water.
- Avoid walking beneath overhanging ice and snow. Report such issues to the premises manager.
- Where possible, take breaks in a warm, dry place.
- Monitor weather forecasts and external conditions to avoid getting trapped at work.
- Don't drive through flood water.

Key points

- In extreme weather conditions all staff need to play their part in keeping themselves and their colleagues safe.
- Be ready to reassess the safety of your plans as information becomes available and adapt them accordingly. Keep your manager informed.
- Take a cautious approach to getting the job done, e.g. being properly equipped before travelling, wearing the correct personal protective clothing, moving slowly on slippery surfaces.