Tool Box Talks

Topic: Getting Ready for Winter Work

Working outdoors in the winter can be a cold and dirty job, but something many of us have to do. There are a few simple rules for staying healthy and safe when working outside during the winter. Most people are unaware that skin can begin to freeze at 28 degrees Fahrenheit, so it's important to take proper care when working in cold weather. The two main concerns when working outdoors are hypothermia and frostbite, both are results from prolonged exposure to the cold. Deep frostbite can cause blood clots and gangrene; whereas hypothermia can be potentially fatal. Hypothermia symptoms include fatigue, nausea, confusion, lightheadedness and profuse sweating. If untreated the victim may lose consciousness and die.

Simple tips with how you dress for the winter can keep you safe in cold weather, and help you avoid hypothermia and frostbite.

- Wear the correct gloves for the work you are performing. Gloves should be insulated enough to protect against freezing temperatures, but thin enough to allow you to easily manipulate tools or controls.
- Dress in several light layers of clothes, instead of one single layer of heavy clothing. Layers are easily removed to prevent perspiration and overheating. Keep in mind that wet clothing is 20 times less warm than dry clothing.
- Wear a hat. As much as 50% of your body heat is lost through a bare head. This also goes for your ears. Protect them from frostbite by using a hat that will pull down far enough to cover them.
- A scarf may seem like a good way to keep your neck and body warm in the cold weather, but they are potential entanglement hazards. Try to avoid any clothing that is too loose, or that hangs, such as long sleeves or dangling drawstrings.
- Don't let your safety eyewear fog up in the cold. Anti-fog coatings and wipes are an easy investment, but make sure they are appropriate for your eyewear. Remember, if your safety eyewear isn't over your eyes then it's not protecting you.
- Shoes are one of the last items you usually put on, but should be one of the first items to inspect. The soles of your winter footwear should have good tread to prevent slips and falls on wet or icy surfaces. Clogs or cleats can be used, and should be attached to your footwear in extremely slippery conditions. Remember to slow down when advancing across slippery surfaces; a fall is easily preventable when being careful on ladders, platforms and stairways.
- Make sure you carry blankets or sleeping bags, matches, candles, a snow shovel, sandbags, a flashlight and non-perishable foods in your vehicle. It is easy to become stranded or snowed in with your vehicle and preparation can pay off.

Employee Participants