impact hr toolbox talk

Working in Cold Weather

This Toolbox Talk aims to raise awareness of the risks associated with working in cold or severe weather conditions.

Tell me more

Cold weather can have a serious impact on our health, wellbeing, and performance.

By planning ahead, using the right protective measures, and acting promptly when conditions deteriorate, we can work safely and responsibly throughout the winter period.

Why It Matters

- Cold weather can reduce both safety and performance.
- Workers who are cold, fatigued, or uncomfortable are more likely to make errors, experience loss of grip, or slip and fall.
- In extreme cases, cold stress can cause hypothermia, frostbite, and cardiac strain.

Case Study

A 2018 case highlighted the consequences of inadequate planning. A lone security worker died of hypothermia after being stranded on-site during snow, without reliable heating or communication.

The incident led to fines totalling nearly £900,000 and reinforced the importance of robust welfare, reliable communications, and clear stop-work criteria in adverse weather.

Common cold-related hazards

- Loss of dexterity and slower reaction times.
- Slips, trips, and falls caused by ice, frost, or wet surfaces.

Safe Working Practices

Planning & Environment

- Monitor weather forecasts and plan work accordingly.
- Establish trigger points for stopping or suspending work during severe conditions.
- Consider site remoteness, communication reliability, and emergency access.
- Record supervisory checks and ensure safe start procedures are followed.
- Maintain reasonable indoor temperatures where (16°C or 13°C for strenuous work).
- Use heated rest areas, warm drinks, and frequent breaks in warm conditions.
- For generator-powered welfare cabins, ensure backup power and regular maintenance.
- Shorten outdoor exposure times and rotate tasks.
- Schedule heavier work for the warmest part of the day.
- Avoid lone working where possible. Consider a buddy system.
- Allow extra travel and setup time during poor weather.

Clothing and PPE

- Wear layered, breathable, and waterproof clothing to retain warmth and stay dry.
- Ensure gloves, boots, and head protection are insulated.
- Keep spare dry clothing available.
- PPE should fit correctly and be maintained in good condition.

Communication and Emergency Arrangements

- Ensure and maintain 2-way contact with colleagues and supervisors. Consider radios or satellite devices where mobile coverage is unreliable.
- Confirm site access and egress routes in snow or ice.
- Establish and understand a clear escalation plan and emergency contact procedure. *"What if things go wrong?"*

Training and Awareness

- Recognise signs of cold stress: shivering, fatigue, slurred speech, confusion, numbness, or loss of coordination.
- Report early signs of discomfort to colleagues and managers.
- Monitor weather conditions and act decisively if safety deteriorates.

Additional Considerations

Vehicle safety: Check fuel, tyres, brakes, lights, and antifreeze before driving.

Fatigue: Cold and shorter daylight hours can increase fatigue — plan rest breaks.

Hydration: Drink fluids regularly.

Environmental: Manage salt, grit, and drainage to prevent slips and pollution.

Discussion Points

- Are there any cold weather risks which could affect our site or tasks?
- How do we check welfare facilities and communications before bad weather?
- What improvements can we make to our cold-weather procedures?