TOOLBOX TALKS

TOPIC: COLD-RELATED ILLNESSES

Workers in the winter construction, agriculture, maritime and commercial fishing industries are often exposed to the most extreme risks, but cold stress is not exclusive to outdoor workers. Those who work in cold storage or food processing, as well as those in facilities without heat or insulation, are also at risk.

RISK FACTORS

ENVIRONMENTAL:

Contact with cold water or surfaces // Cold air temps, high wind speeds, damp air // Exposure to vibration from tools and equipment // Working without proper PPE

PERSONAL:

Age, weight, fitness // Chronic or acute illness (weakened immune system) // Alcohol and drug consumption // Dehydration // Acclimatization (gradually increase exposure to the cold; taking frequent warming breaks)

COMMON COLD-RELATED ILLNESSES

HYPOTHERMIA

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Shivering // Poor coordination and slowing of pace // Stumbling and clumsiness // Dazed and confused behavior // Slurred and slow speech // Hallucinations or changes in personality

WHAT TO DO:

Mild Case: Move to warm area and stay active. Cover head and body with dry clothes or blankets. Drink a warm (not hot) drink. **Moderate Case:** Same as Mild, plus contact emergency medical personnel. Re-warm extremities. **Severe Case:** Treat worker very gently and do not apply external heat to re-warm. Hospital treatment is required.

FROSTBITE

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

White, grayish, or bluish skin // Cold, hard, or waxy feel to skin // May itch, burn, or feel numb // Blistering and hardening of skin are signs of extreme frostbite

WHAT TO DO:

Get out of the cold // Gradually warm the affected skin // Place frostbitten areas in warm – not hot – water // Wrap affected areas in a warm blanket // Seek emergency medical help ASAP // **NOTE:** Do not rub or massage the frostbitten area or use a heating pad, heat lamp or other heat source for warming.

TRENCHFOOT

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Numbness // Swelling // Blisters

WHAT TO DO:

Remove wet socks and footwear // Thoroughly clean with warm water // Dry feet // When sleeping or resting, do not wear socks // Get medical treatment ASAP

DISCUSSION DATE: _____

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPANTS:

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Toolbox Talks are intended to facilitate worksite health and safety conversations. For more Toolbox Talks, please visit www.ergodyne.com/blog

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