

Health and Safety Alert No. 3

Winter Working

Background information

Winter working is hazardous because wind, rain, snow, ice, poor light all lead to a harsh working environment and this fact is usually reflected in accident statistics for the construction industry, i.e. the months of January to March traditionally account for a large proportion of annual accidents on sites.

Hazards

- The Working Environment
- The Various Work Activities

The Working Environment

- Access paths** may become treacherous with ice or snow. Keep a supply of grit and salt close by.
- Fire Risks.** The risk of fire may be heightened by dangerous or unauthorised heating methods. Do not use unauthorised gas fires, paraffin stoves, open fires, etc. Do not cover heaters in drying rooms with wet clothes, use the facilities provided. Provision must be available to hang clothing for the purpose of safe drying.
- Adverse conditions.** Operations may have to be limited or stopped altogether in high winds, snow, ice or heavy rain.
- Cold.** The wearing of several layers of clothing instead of one single heavy outer garment gives good insulation. Loose fitting cotton fabric is ideal.
- Lighting.** Lower levels of natural light are to be expected during the winter months and the need to provide extra local lighting a probability. Arriving and leaving site in darkness may require additional lighting in areas such as car parks, access paths and roads.

The Working Activities

- PPE.** Think 'EXTRA'. More equipment will be required, especially gloves and wet weather clothing. These need to be changed more frequently as wet clothing provides poor insulation. Take account of risk assessment to help with decision making.
- Working at height** is hazardous at the best of times, and even more so during wintry conditions that may leave work platforms slippery. Beware of early morning frosts on scaffold boards and access ladders.
- Manual handling.** Watch closely for snow or ice on loads to be lifted. Snow will increase the weight of a load and ice may act as an adhesive attracting extra weight. Wear appropriate gloves.
- Plant and equipment** may not function correctly. All plant should have extra precautions to combat the effects of the cold. Check for anti-freeze and battery state.
- Winter driving** on site may require special skills. Is the driver experienced? Is the vehicle fit for the job? i.e. the use of a 4x4 may be more appropriate, but only if the driver has had the appropriate training.

Question Time

- Q How are Fire Risks created during winter working?
- Q What is the best way of keeping warm during winter working – single heavy outer garment or layers?
- Q What should you be aware of in wintry conditions on scaffold boards and ladders?
- Q Why may you need to change PPE more frequently?

SAFETY REMINDER:

WINTER WORKING CAN LEAD TO A HIGH NUMBER OF ACCIDENTS DURING COLD AND INCLEMENT WEATHER, BE VIGILANT AND AWARE OF THE RISKS WORKING IN SUCH WEATHER ENTAILS.

Mark Randle
H&S Manager November 2010