

Actsafes Safety Bulletin #34

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING IN EXTREME COLD TEMPERATURE CONDITIONS



1. INTRODUCTION:

When working in cold conditions, the two most common hazards are hypothermia and frostbite. With proper awareness and pre-planning, these hazards can be eliminated.

2. HYPOTHERMIA:

Hypothermia is a potentially deadly condition, which results in an abnormally low body temperature. This drop in temperature occurs when the body loses heat faster than it is produced. Anyone exposed to near freezing temperatures for prolonged periods of time should be familiar in the prevention and treatment of hypothermia. A combination of cold, wet and windy conditions will result in hypothermia for anyone who is inadequately prepared and protected.

- a. Certain conditions that will increase your risk:
 - i. Improper dress for the conditions
 - ii. Poor physical condition
 - iii. Fatigue
 - iv. Illness
 - v. Poor diet or alcohol, tobacco or drug use
 - vi. An individual's physiology may affect the body's ability to acclimate; possibly, increasing the risk.

- b. Early symptoms of hypothermia that are often overlooked include:
 - i. Intense shivering
 - ii. Muscle tension
 - iii. Fatigue
 - iv. Intense feeling of cold or numbness

To most people these may just seem like normal consequences of exposure to winter conditions. Ignoring these early signs can be very dangerous. If you or a co-worker experience early symptoms of hypothermia, take action.

Additional behavioral signs to watch for include:

- Slurred speech
- Difficulty performing tasks
- Loss of coordination
- Lethargy
- Erratic behavior, poor decisions
- Irritability
- Slow breathing and heart rate

At the first sign of any of these conditions, notify your supervisor and/or seek medical attention (i.e. set medic, studio hospital or medical provider) then go inside and get warm, before you attempt to complete the job or project you are working on.