

Working in winter

OHS information for employers and workers

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide employers and workers with health and safety information about working in winter.

Key information

- Employers have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of workers.
- Being ready for winter conditions means being aware of hazards and being prepared.

Alberta's unpredictable winter weather creates many hazardous conditions. While Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation does not specifically address working in cold weather, employers are obligated to protect their workers and other individuals at or around the work site from potential hazards. Workers also have an obligation to take reasonable care to protect the health and safety of themselves and others in the vicinity of the work site.



Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* section 3(1) states

Every employer shall ensure, as far as it is

reasonably practicable for the employer to do so

- (a) the health and safety and welfare of
 - (i) workers engaged in the work of that employer,
 - (ii) those workers not engaged in the work of that employer but present at the work site at which that work is being carried out, and
 - (iii) other persons at or in the vicinity of the work site who may be affected by hazards originating from the work site

This bulletin outlines some common winter hazards and ways to address those hazards; however, there may be additional requirements related to your work site or the type of work you do. It is essential that you identify and address all hazards.

At the work site

Indoors or outdoors, winter conditions can put workers at risk. Before winter, review your hazard assessment to help identify any additional seasonal hazards. Ensure all identified existing and potential hazards are addressed.

- Keep walks, entryways and loading docks clear of water, ice and snow. Keep snow shovels and de-icer or sand near these areas.
- Make sure parking lots are plowed, sanded and well lit.
- Check that heating, ventilation and monitoring systems are ready for winter.
 - Inspect heating systems for proper function and make sure all work areas have appropriate ventilation.
 - Test carbon monoxide detectors or monitoring equipment, and exhaust systems.
 - To learn more about carbon monoxide, read **Carbon monoxide at the work site (CH031)**.
- Check the weather forecast. Employers can consider allowing workers to go home early if a storm is imminent or offer work-from-home options on days when weather is severe.



Working outside

Many Alberta industries, including oilfield and construction, continue outdoor work year-round. In winter, changing weather conditions bring new hazards to working outdoors.

- Frost in the early mornings and in shaded areas can be an unexpected slip and fall hazard, as it

may only appear under certain weather conditions. Keep pathways well lit and sanded.

- Shorter daylight hours increase the need for appropriate lighting.
 - Position lights so they do not create shadows.
 - Consider scheduling tasks according to the light required. For example, schedule big equipment moves for full daylight hours.
- Working at heights poses a higher risk in winter conditions.
 - Wind or frost and ice can destabilize supports such as ladders or roofing brackets.
 - Snow on rooftops can hide hazards such as skylights or vents.
 - Workers are more susceptible to cold exposure due to high winds.
 - Snow is heavy and adds to the load on roofs or raised surfaces. Consider the maximum load limit of the surface before adding the weight of a worker to that load.

Worker performance

Temperature, wind, level of activity and clothing can all affect how an individual experiences cold. Health effects associated with working in the cold include frostbite and hypothermia. The following controls can help protect workers from cold weather conditions:

- give workers time to adjust to colder conditions before assigning a full work schedule
- provide enclosures and heating systems where practical and possible
- shield workers from drafts and wind
- use a work/warm-up schedule, limiting the period of outdoor work between warm-ups
- use a buddy system to avoid working alone in very cold weather
- educate workers on signs of over exposure to cold which can result in health problems such as frostbite and hypothermia

See **Best Practice – Working Safely in the Heat and Cold (GS006)** for more information on the health risks of working in cold weather conditions.



Winter safety basics

Conditions outside change every day in the winter. Simple precautions can help prevent slips, falls, frostbite and hypothermia.

Walk with care. Take short shuffle-like steps and keep your hands out of your pockets. Use available handrails. Be aware of hazards under the snow, such as ice or holes. Assume all wet pavement is slippery and icy.

Dress appropriately. Always have hat and mitts or gloves on hand. Wear insulated, waterproof footwear with non-slip treads.

Driving for work

Being prepared for winter driving is just as important as knowing how to drive safely in winter conditions.

- Ensure vehicles have appropriate tires for the roads they travel. Snow tires are best for most parts of Alberta in winter. All four tires should match in size, type and speed rating. Check air pressure often – air pressure drops about 1 psi for every 5°C.
- Winterize vehicles. Check exhaust, heating and cooling systems for leaks. Test the battery and replace if necessary. Check lights regularly. Change to winter windshield wipers.
- Equip each vehicle with a winter survival kit.
- Scrape frost from windows to improve visibility.
- Remove snow and ice from vehicles to prevent flying snow and ice from endangering other vehicles on the road.
- Remind workers to activate taillights in inclement weather by turning on headlights. Taillights are not lit with automatic daytime running lights.
- Consider developing a winter driving policy that lists responsibilities and expectations for both the employer and workers.
- Consider developing winter driving procedures to outline how to respond to different situations.
- Check the weather forecast and road reports when planning any travel. If possible, postpone trips when conditions are unsafe.

For more information about winter driving for work, read **Snow and Ice on Commercial Vehicles (GS011)**, the CCOSH fact sheet **Driving Tips – Winter**, and Transport Canada's **Winter Driving** page.



Contact Us

OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton & area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired:

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

PSI Online Reporting Service

alberta.ca/report-potentially-serious-incidents.aspx

Website

alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx

For more information

Carbon monoxide at the work site (CH031)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ch031

Best Practice – Working Safely in the Heat and Cold (GS006)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/g006

Snow and Ice on Commercial Vehicles (GS011)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/g011

CCOHS – Driving Tips – Winter

ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/icesnow.html

Transport Canada - Winter Driving

tc.gc.ca/eng/motorvehiclesafety/safevehicles-safetyfeatures-winterdriving-index-693.htm

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