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Corporate Insurance Brokers

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Insurance Profile

6 Construction Site Safety Tips for Winter Weather

Winter weather brings colder temperatures, shorter daylight hours, ice and snow—all of which can impact construction site safety, productivity and compliance. Slips and trips are a particular concern, as the Health and Safety Executive notes that several thousand construction workers are injured each year in this way. Many of these injuries involve broken bones or dislocated joints. This can increase the risk of employer liability claims and reduce productivity.

Construction employers must take proactive safety measures to keep employees safe and ensure operational continuity. Consider the following steps to help keep your site and crew safe this winter:

1. Inspect the site and plan around the forecast.

Check the site before work begins each morning and risk-assess planned tasks based on the day's weather. Look for waterlogging, mud, ice, and uneven surfaces, and fix problems promptly. If your site is prone to flooding, plan to move equipment and materials to higher ground and use effective drainage, temporary flood barriers or pumps. Build flexibility into schedules so work can pause or shift when conditions worsen, and keep emergency plans, including evacuation and emergency service contacts, up to date.

2. Keep walkways and access routes clear.

Grit or clear ice, snow, mud and wet leaves from walkways, steps and ladders to prevent slips and falls. Use temporary walkways or platforms where the ground is poor. Require footwear with good grip, and ask workers to remove mud from their boots before using ladders or stairs.

3. Improve lighting and visibility.

Sunset comes early in winter, so plan additional lighting for each stage of the project. Provide high-visibility clothing and head torches, and set reduced speed limits for on-site vehicles.

4. Protect workers from the cold.

Encourage layers of waterproof and windproof clothing, insulated boots and gloves, and liners under hard hats. Schedule regular breaks in a warm, dry area with hot food and drinks, and provide a drying room. Train workers to recognise the signs of hypothermia, frostbite and other cold-related illness. In addition, assess the risks of using power tools in cold weather, as cold weather can worsen joint pain linked to hand-arm vibration.

5. Manage heaters, vehicles and equipment.

Keep heaters uncovered and well away from combustible materials, as fires are more likely when workers use them to dry clothes. Maintain machinery and vehicles, check for wear and tyre tread depth, and provide additional driver training as needed.

6. Support wellbeing in darker months.

Shorter days can affect mood and energy, and seasonal affective disorder can bring sadness, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Encourage workers to spend time outdoors during daylight hours, even for a short walk, and remind them of any available employee assistance programme or helpline.

Summary

Employers have a legal duty to assess the risks their workers face and to take reasonable steps to protect them, including from cold and adverse weather. Where exposure cannot be avoided, employers should provide suitable protective clothing and equipment. They should also keep records of inspections, risk assessments, and training to demonstrate compliance and support any insurance claim.

Contact us for further risk management guidance and insurance solutions.

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