



WisCon Words of Wisdom

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December Awareness Topics

All Month Long:

[Safe Toys & Gift Month](#)

[Holiday Season Drunk Driving](#)

Burnout and Safety

Burnout isn't just an emotional issue — it can impact your team's safety. Tired, disengaged employees are more likely to make mistakes, overlook hazards, or take shortcuts that compromise safety.

Signs of Burnout include:

- **Physical:** Persistent fatigue, which can lead to impaired reaction times.
- **Emotional:** Frustration or apathy, increasing the likelihood of unsafe behavior.
- **Cognitive:** Difficulty concentrating, leading to missed hazards or safety steps.

What Employers Can Do:

- Promote regular breaks and mental health days.
- Create a supportive environment to prevent stress from affecting performance.
- Encourage open communication about workload and safety concerns.

Addressing burnout is not only good for your employees' well-being, it's also key to maintaining a safe workplace.

We want to hear from you!

What content would you like to see in an upcoming newsletter? Let us know [here](#).

Holiday Lights – A Festive Hazard

Decorating the workplace is a great way to boost morale, but holiday lights can increase the risk of electrical fires, slips, trips, and falls. According to OSHA, temporary wiring (like extension cords and holiday lights) is a leading cause of electrical citations. OSHA standards, specifically 1910.305 for general industry, limit what can and cannot be done with flexible cords. Flexible cords (including holiday lights) are not meant for permanent use. Generally, permanent use is considered as anything beyond 90 days.

4 Safety Tips For Temporary Wiring:

- **Inspect Before You Connect:** Check for frayed wires, cracked insulation, or broken sockets. If a strand is damaged, throw it out—do not try to tape it.
- **No "Daisy Chaining":** Never plug a power strip into another power strip (surge protectors) to reach an outlet. This overloads the circuit and creates a significant fire risk.
- **Watch the Walkways:** Extension cords running across hallways are a guaranteed trip hazard. Use cord covers or tape them down securely. Even better, route them along walls.
- **Indoor vs. Outdoor:** Verify the rating. Using "Indoor Only" lights on the exterior of your building is dangerous, as they are not insulated against moisture or cold.

Bonus Tip: Assign a "Last Person Out" protocol to ensure all decorative lights are turned off at the end of every shift.

LPG Forklifts and Carbon Monoxide

Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) forklifts are warehouse staples, but "incomplete combustion" can turn them into deadly hazards. Unlike diesel smoke, Carbon Monoxide (CO) is invisible and odorless.

If your engines run "rich" or have dirty air filters, they can emit massive amounts of CO, turning semi-trailers and closed warehouses into hazardous atmospheres. CO acts as a chemical asphyxiant, starving the brain of oxygen even while breathing normally.

Watch for "The Warehouse Flu": If operators report headaches, dizziness, or nausea that disappears when they leave work, you may have an issue with CO.

3 Steps to Protect Your Team:

1. **Tune It Up:** A poorly maintained forklift can emit dramatically more CO than properly tuned forklifts. Make emissions analysis part of routine maintenance.
2. **Ventilate:** Never let LPG lifts enter semi-trailers without proper airflow.
3. **Monitor:** Install CO detectors in the facility. You cannot manage what you do not measure.

Working in the Cold

As temperatures begin to drop, many workers across the state face increased risks of cold stress. Cold stress doesn't just mean feeling cold, it can lead to serious illnesses, injuries, and even death if not properly managed.

Understanding Cold Stress

Cold stress occurs when skin temperature drops and eventually affects internal body temperature. This can be triggered even in temperatures above freezing, especially when wind, moisture, and exhaustion are present. The body is forced to work harder to maintain its core temperature, often redirecting blood flow away from the hands, feet, and skin. This process puts workers at risk for severe health problems.

Common Cold-Induced Illnesses

Recognizing the signs of cold-related illnesses is the first step toward preventing a serious medical emergency.

- **Hypothermia:** Occurs when body temperature falls below 95°F. Early signs include shivering, fatigue, and clumsiness. Severe symptoms can include confusion, loss of consciousness, or death.
- **Frostbite:** The freezing of skin and underlying tissues, typically in the fingers, toes, nose, or ears. It can result in permanent damage and, in severe cases, amputation.
- **Trench Foot:** Caused by prolonged exposure to wet and cold conditions. Symptoms include numbness, swelling, blisters, and in extreme cases, gangrene.
- **Chilblain:** The painful inflammation of small blood vessels in the skin, caused by repeated exposure to cold but not freezing air.

Prevention Starts with Preparation

Employers and workers must collaborate to create a safe working environment during cold weather.

For Employers:

- Train workers to recognize cold stress symptoms and administer first aid.
- Provide radiant heaters or create wind shields when possible.
- Schedule heavier physical tasks during the warmer parts of the day.
- Implement a buddy system so workers can monitor each other for symptoms.
- Ensure frequent breaks are taken in warm, dry areas.
- Acclimate new or returning workers by gradually increasing their exposure to cold conditions.

For Workers:

- **Dress in layers:**
- **Base layer:** Moisture-wicking fabric (wool, silk, or synthetic)

to keep skin dry.

- **Middle layer:** Insulating material (fleece or wool) to retain body heat.
- **Outer layer:** A wind and waterproof jacket with ventilation to protect from the elements.
- Wear insulated, waterproof boots and gloves.
- Cover your head, neck, and face with a hat, scarf, or balaclava.
- Keep extra dry clothing and socks on hand to change into if you get wet.
- Drink warm, sweet fluids (avoiding alcohol and caffeine).
- Stay dry. Wet clothing loses its insulating value and causes you to lose body heat rapidly.
- Watch for symptoms of cold stress in yourself and your coworkers.

What To Do In an Emergency

If you suspect a coworker is suffering from a cold-related illness, follow your company's procedures for addressing these types of illnesses. If your company does not have procedures consider the following:

For Hypothermia or Frostbite:

1. **Call 911 immediately.**
2. Move the person to a warm, dry space.
3. Replace wet clothes with dry layers.
4. Cover their body with blankets (but not their face).
5. Apply warm compresses to the chest, armpits, and groin.
6. Do NOT rub frostbitten skin or attempt to rewarm the area if professional medical help is far away, as refreezing can cause more damage.

For Trench Foot:

1. Remove wet shoes and socks.
2. Gently dry the feet.
3. Avoid letting the person walk on the affected feet. Seek medical attention immediately.

Stay Safe, Stay Warm

Cold stress is a real and preventable threat. By recognizing the signs, dressing properly, and using safe work practices, everyone can stay healthy through the colder months. Employers and team leaders should include cold stress prevention in safety training and daily briefings throughout the winter season.

Resources

[OSHA Cold Stress](#)

[CDC Cold Stress](#)

[Cold Stress Prevention Face Sheet](#)

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