

POLICY FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

PART C - ARRANGEMENTS

SECTION 19

WINTER WORKING

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APPENDIX A - WINTER WORKING CHECKLIST

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to comply with the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, the council must ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the Health, Safety and Welfare of all employees.

During the winter, certain environmental conditions exist that can cause accidents or increase the likelihood of injuries to service users and workers. This arrangement provides guidelines in avoiding or reducing the risks that arise during the winter.

This policy applies to all employees and covers all workplaces.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

Directors have a duty to ensure that there are appropriate safe systems within their service to reduce the risks associated with winter working to their lowest level to comply with this arrangement.

Managers - Where systems of work include providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), reference should be made to Section 16 of the Health, Safety and Welfare policy.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this document is to identify aspects of winter working that can harm health, assess any likely detrimental effects, and recommend control measures to reduce the likelihood of illness or injury.

In addition, there are service safe working procedures, safety bulletins, codes of practice and instructions that relate to cold weather and the considerations that the Council must make for this (examples include road gritting and working on highways). These should still be followed in full, as the purpose of this arrangement is to provide general guidance, not specific information. For ease of use, this section is arranged around five main headings. They are;

- i. **Human Factors (relating to people the ability of the body to cope)**
- ii. **Occupational Factors (relating to the job)**
- iii. **Workplace and Environmental Factors (relating to the immediate surroundings)**
- iv. **Equipment Factors**
- v. **Winter working checklist**

4. HUMAN FACTORS

4.1 Low temperatures

The lower average temperature in the winter can have a number of effects on the human body. These include conditions such as;

- hypothermia, when the body loses heat faster than it produces heat
- frostbite, when parts of the body become so cold that blood flow ceases and permanent damage can occur
- cold burns, when the skin freezes, sometimes sticking to a very cold surface
- reduced attention to risks
- slower reaction times
- less ability to perform delicate tasks
- exposure to draughts

Hypothermia can be difficult to detect as through the distraction of work or the desire to complete a task, employees may not be aware of initial symptoms. The onset of the condition is accelerated by wind chill factor. Also, heat loss due to continual wearing of wet clothing can cause or worsen the onset of hypothermia.

Frostbite and hypothermia are hazards not only for staff who regularly work outdoors but also staff who move in and out of buildings, for example delivery drivers. It is best practice to issue lighter layers of clothing and where possible adjust the task to reduce the risk, either through people or number of deliveries, rather than simply the provision of heavy insulated clothing.

Staff in offices near external doors may suffer as a result of draughts caused by frequently opening doors. Provision of temporary screens, heaters and automatic door closures may help reduce this risk.

In general, the likelihood of the above conditions developing can be reduced with the use of warm waterproof clothing, including gloves, boots and hats. It is also important to provide work breaks in a warm environment away from the wind (in a building or vehicle) and to take warm drinks or food to increase the body temperature and replace lost fluids, preventing dehydration. Alcohol must be avoided as it accelerates heat loss.

5. OCCUPATIONAL FACTORS

These factors relate to the ability of the actual work activity to cause harm to the individual. The control of these factors depends on the risk assessment process of identifying the hazard, assessing the likelihood of that hazard causing harm and putting in place control measures to avoid or reduce the risk. Occupational factors include:

5.1 Manual Handling

Warming up

Manual handling includes the movement of any load by physical effort and, therefore includes numerous tasks. It is vital in cold weather to ensure that workers “warm up” joints and muscles before undertaking physical work. Muscle strain is more likely to occur in cold conditions if careful warming up is not done.

The load

The load is also an important factor in manual handling. Managers should ensure that handles or edges are dry and easy to grip, so that carrying can be done safely. In the winter, the ground can be slippery, metal objects can become very cold and some materials can increase in weight due to water absorption or snow covering. All these factors can make Manual Handling more difficult and should be included in assessments in the winter. (See Section 12 of the Corporate Health, Safety and Welfare Policy for further information)

5.2 Hours of work

The number of hours worked by individuals in cold environments must be carefully considered to avoid causing harm to them and to ensure compliance with the law. Two important factors apply.

- Work breaks should be of sufficient duration and frequent enough to allow the worker to warm up.
- The actual number of hours worked, which must comply with corporate standards and the Working Time Regulations

6. WORKPLACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

6.1 Heating

Legislation states that the temperature of workplaces must be maintained at a reasonable level. For buildings a reasonable temperature is 16°C after the first hour for mainly seated work and 13°C in workplaces where the work involves physical activity. If it is not possible to achieve these temperatures, managers may need to provide auxiliary heating (see paragraph 8.4). Different temperature standards exist for schools. These are explained in local guidance.

6.2 Ice and snow

The main hazards associated with ice and snow relate to slips and trips. Accidents can be reduced by ensuring that employees wear suitable non-slip footwear if their job involves working outdoors. Snow and ice should also be cleared from entrance and exit routes to buildings (see paragraph 8.5).

Employees have a duty to take care of their own safety by wearing suitable footwear to work, taking care in slippery conditions and using doormats to reduce water and slush being carried into buildings. Extra maintenance of doormats and cleaning of floors also helps reduce the risk of slips and trips.

6.3 Wet weather

When the body is wet, heat is lost at a faster rate which can accelerate the onset of hypothermia.

6.4 High winds

The detrimental effects of cold weather are made worse if low temperature is combined with strong winds. This is known as the wind chill factor. Research by the HSE has concluded that perceived temperatures can be reduced by up to 10°C by a wind speed of 20 mph.

6.5 Lighting

Workplace Regulations require adequate lighting, provided by natural light where reasonably practicable. With fewer daylight hours, levels of ambient light are much lower in the winter,. Artificial lighting may therefore be needed inside buildings to ensure safe passage around the workplace. In certain situations there may also be a need to reduce the likelihood of eye strain during close detailed work or the use of computer or other display screens by providing local lighting to supplement or replace overhead lights.

Most workplaces will be equipped with adequate artificial lighting. If not, then the use of auxiliary lighting should be considered (see paragraph 9.4). There may also be a need to consider glare from the low winter sun and the use of curtains or blinds.

Reduced light levels can result in accidents, caused because employees are not able to see clearly, not being visible to vehicles and difficulty in the using tools. Managers must consider re-organising work so it can be done during daylight hours, or alternatively, provide local lighting so that the job can be done safely.

6.6 Water leaks/flooding

These may be a result of leaking roofs or floods from heavy rain, or from burst pipes and water mains. Where possible, switch off or stop the water at the source and arrange for emergency repair as soon as possible. If the flooding affects pedestrian traffic routes', working areas or water is in contact with any electrical equipment, then partial evacuation may be necessary. The decision is the responsibility of the Premises manager, but advice can be obtained from the Safety, health and Wellbeing team.

6.7 Structural

Structural problems can occur as a result of high winds, flooding or soil erosion, or snow load on fragile roofs. Premises managers should familiarise themselves with the procedures to obtain emergency remedial work in case such problems occur, partial evacuation may be necessary.

6.8 Access/egress

The Council has a legal duty to provide and maintain safe access and egress to the workplace. Entrances and exits, including emergency exits, must be kept clear of any slip or trip hazards such as snow, ice or accumulations of wet fallen leaves at all times when the building is in use. This duty extends to the protection of non-employees (visitors and the public). Suitable action is:

- Clearing the most used areas in priority to those less used.
- Arrange clearing so that it is undertaken before the heaviest traffic periods i.e. on many sites twice a day in the early morning and in the evening if necessary will cope with arrival and departure of employees.
- Stop at the boundary of the property. Additional common-law liability may arise out of clearing the Public Highway if not cleared properly.

7. EQUIPMENT FACTORS

7.1 Vibrating equipment

Cold weather can speed up the onset of a condition known as Vibration White Finger (VWF). This is a debilitating condition associated with the use of vibrating tools such as pneumatic drills and hammer drills. The methods used to control VWF must be more stringently applied in cold conditions. These methods include restricting the time the machine is used for and providing protective devices to absorb vibrations. For detailed information on managing vibration, (see section 28 of the Corporate Health, Safety and Welfare Policy for further information).

7.2 Electrical equipment

Electrically powered equipment can pose serious risks of injury if used in wet conditions. Methods to reduce risks include low voltage systems, which reduce the severity of electric shocks and RCD's (residual current devices), which protect users against electric shocks if a fault occurs with the equipment.

7.3 Vehicles

The use of vehicles on the road is usually the responsibility of the driver. Accidents can be reduced by careful checking of lights, windscreen wash, tyre condition, brakes and by drivers taking extra care on the road. Following closely the rules of the Highway Code will go a long way to preventing road accidents in all road conditions.

Site vehicles and traffic, although not covered by road traffic law, must also be carefully controlled and many of the same rules apply as with vehicle use on the road. Reducing accidents depends on safe vehicles as well as safe drivers. Times between appointments must allow reasonable time for travelling in adverse weather conditions.

The provision of extra facilities to drivers who are out for prolonged periods, such as gritter drivers may be appropriate, for example;

- blankets
- a spade
- a mobile phone
- a vacuum flask for hot drinks

7.4 Auxiliary heating and lighting

If it is necessary to use auxiliary heating or lighting, it is vital to ensure that this does not compromise the safety of the workplace. For heaters, consider risks of fire when locating the heaters, consider any gas supply to the heater or any exhaust gases produced by the heater or in the case of electric heaters, the possibility of overloading the power supply.

Some gas or paraffin heaters require extra ventilation. Follow the instructions carefully and be sure to provide what is necessary.

For provision of lighting, consider glare to people or traffic and again, the possibility of a power supply overload.

For both heaters and lights, be careful to avoid trip hazards from trailing power leads. The practice of workers bringing heaters from home is prohibited, as the council cannot be certain that these heaters are safe to use.

7.5 Selection and maintenance of equipment

It is a legal requirement to select suitable equipment for any task. This means that health and safety must be considered when choosing the equipment that will be used for the job. Equipment used in the winter must be:

- designed and constructed to a recognised standard
- robust enough for the task
- suitable for the environment it is to be used in
- maintained at an appropriate interval and to an appropriate standard

7.6 Scaffolds and excavations

The use of scaffolds for access to areas in need of maintenance is controlled under specific codes of practice. Extra precautions must be taken in the winter to account for slippery surfaces, protection of workers on and around the scaffold as well as the public and the stability of the scaffold in high winds or on ground softened by rain.

Excavations will be more prone to collapse if the ground is soft and can fill with rain. Pumps and extra bracing should be provided to remove water and prevent collapse respectively. Where severe weather is anticipated, it is

reasonable to ask contractors to inspect and ensure that scaffolds and excavations will be sufficient and to advise on when they should be taken out of use.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION

The Health and Safety Executive has a section on its website with information on working in cold environments.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm>

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/information/coldstress.htm>

The HSE does not have specific guidance on working in temperatures below 12°C, compliance with British/European Standards, however, ensures employees are working to the minimum standard expected. As a first point of reference in these circumstances, the following British Standards should be referred to.

- BS EN 511: Specification for protective gloves against cold
- ISO 13732-3 Ergonomics of the thermal environment - Touching of cold surfaces Part 3. Ergonomics data and guidance for application
- ISO 11079 Evaluation of cold environments - Determination of required clothing insulation (IREQ)

WINTER WORKING CHECKLIST

This section contains lists that can be used as a reminder to ensure that precautions are in place to reduce the chances of illness or injury resulting from winter conditions.

General

- Keep warm and dry as far as possible.
- Provide a warm dry place for workers to take breaks (this can be in a vehicle).
- Plan work that involves working outdoors, and avoid winter working where possible.
- Review risk assessments to take account of wet, cold or windy conditions.
- Be aware of emergency procedures in case a problem occurs.
- Be prepared to stop work if weather conditions make it unreasonably dangerous.
- Provide extra protection for scaffolds and excavations.
- Select any equipment carefully and consider the conditions and the environment in which it is to be used.
- Be extra careful with the use of electricity. Keep electrical equipment well protected from water and avoid overloading supplies with auxiliary heaters or lights.

Working outside

If staff regularly work outside between November and March, check relevant risk assessments to ensure they take account of human factors (section 5) and occupational factors (section 6)

If staff are undertaking construction work or monitoring construction contractors, ensure that risk assessments take into account additional risks identified in sections 6 and 7.

If staff are likely to use electrical equipment outside, see paragraph 7.2 above and section 14 of the corporate health, safety & welfare policy and review relevant risk assessments.

Driving

If staff are required to drive on behalf of the council in extreme weather conditions, ensure relevant risk assessments include control measures outlined in paragraph 7.3

Responsibility for a building

If you have responsibility for a building ensure

- Adequate heating (para 6.1)
- Adequate lighting (para 6.5)
- Safe access & egress (para 6.8)
- Relevant emergency procedures exist if it is perceived that either structural problems or burst pipes could occur during winter months.

If you have responsibility for the provision of auxiliary heating and lighting, ensure that relevant risk assessments and safe working practices comply with paragraph 7.4.