

Is your workforce ready for winter?

Risk Control Services

State Auto is reminding employers to make sure that workers are prepared for working in cold weather conditions.

Many employers are unaware that prolonged exposure to winter temperatures, combined with wind, can lead to serious health problems, which can result in lost workdays.

Employees must be able to recognize the workplace conditions that lead to potential frost bite and hypothermia. They must learn the signs and symptoms of these cold-induced illnesses and what to do to help a co-worker. Frostbite is the freezing of skin and tissue. The skin turns waxy-white and becomes numb. It generally affects the fingers, hands, toes, feet, ears and nose. Hypothermia occurs with a drop in the body's core temperature. Early signals include fatigue, shivering, slurred speech and cool bluish skin. It can result in reduced reaction time and mental alertness, both of which are needed for optimal workplace performance.

Employers should provide training to help avoid cold induced illnesses/injuries in the workplace, including but not limited to:

- 1) Proper dressing, in layers, to protect against wet and windy conditions (consider the wind chill factor).
Wear a hat and gloves.
- 2) Reduce exposure time to the elements as becoming exhausted may speed up the effects of extreme temperatures; plan breaks in a warm dry shelter to allow the body to warm up.
- 3) Certain substances inhibit the body's response to the cold (alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and medications).
- 4) The elderly are more vulnerable to the effects of cold weather.

With forethought and proper training, employers can save money while ensuring employees safety during winter.

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