COMPLETE GUIDE ON HOW TO PROTECT WORKERS IN A COLD ENVIRONMENT

- Recognise the environmental and workplace conditions that may pose health and safety risks for workers.
- Spread awareness on the signs and symptoms of cold-induced illnesses and injuries.
- Make sure that workers are aware of the proper clothing, safe work practices, physical fitness requirements, and emergency procedures in case of cold injury.
- Educate workers about the complete and proper clothing to wear for harsh weather conditions. Wool and synthetic fibres are better than cotton which tends to get damp and lose its insulating properties.
- Provide personal heaters and shielding or heated enclosures. Make sure workers can warm up in heated warming rooms or shelters like tents, cabins, or rest rooms.
- Allow frequent short breaks to prevent prolonged sitting/standing and avoid exhaustion or fatigue.
- Implement a ‘buddy system’ so that they can look after each other and watch out for symptoms of hypothermia.
- Assign or schedule workers with poor physical condition on warmer days or more enclosed/less exposed areas of the workplace.
- Provide the proper selection of tools, equipment, and machinery that can withstand extreme temperature so workers can perform their jobs faster and more efficiently.
- Plan the work schedule carefully, including the schedule of breaks. Find out the warmest part of the day and schedule the work on that period.
- Make sure that work is paced to avoid excessive sweating as this can result to damp clothing and low metabolic heat.
- Give new employees enough time to get used or acclimatized to cold and protective clothing before giving them a full workload.
- Carefully consider proper equipment design. Make sure that metal handles and bars are covered in thermal insulating material.
- Tools should be designed so that they can be used without having to remove mittens or gloves.
- Provide separate protection for the eyes and nose or mouth because the exhaled moisture will fog and frost eye shields.
- Provide balanced meals as these are essential to maintain body heat and prevent dehydration.
- Provide fluids when they are doing strenuous work. Hot beverages or soup are best for warming purposes.
- Advise workers to avoid drinking too much coffee. Caffeinated drinks increase urine production and contributes to dehydration. They also increase blood flow at the skin surface which may lower body heat.
- Prohibit alcohol use on or before a worker’s shift starts as it impairs the body’s ability to regulate temperature, increasing the risk of hypothermia.
- Make sure that the air speed in refrigerated rooms do not exceed 1 meter per second.
- Monitor and record the temperature changes in the workplace with a thermometer at least every 4 hours.
- Outline a procedure for providing first aid and obtaining medical care. Assign one trained person for each shift to attend in case of emergencies.