As the weather turns colder during the coming winter months, workers who must brave the outdoor conditions face the occupational hazard of exposure to the cold. More than 700 people die of hypothermia each year in the United States. To help protect workers in cold environments, OSHA reminds employers and workers to take simple precautions, such as those listed in this alert.

Prolonged exposure to freezing temperatures can result in health problems as serious as frostbite and hypothermia. Workers in such industries as construction, commercial fishing and agriculture need to be especially mindful of the weather, its effects on the body, proper prevention techniques, and treatment of cold-related disorders.

An individual gains body heat from food and muscular activity and loses it through convection, conduction, radiation and sweating to maintain a constant body temperature. When body temperature drops even a few degrees below its normal temperature of 98.6°F (37°C), the blood vessels constrict, reducing heat loss from the surface of the skin.

The four environmental conditions that cause cold-related stress are low temperatures, high/cool winds, dampness and cold water. Wind chill, a combination of temperature and wind velocity, is a crucial factor to consider when working outside. A dangerous situation of rapid heat loss may arise for an individual exposed to high winds and cold temperatures.

For more information visit Osha’s website: www.osha.gov

FREE Cold Stress Cards Available From OSHA!

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