

TOOLBOX TALK #48

OVERLOOKED WINTERTIME HAZARDS – PART 2



Outdoor workers need to be protected in every season. When people are on the job during winter months, safety plans need to go beyond preventing hypothermia. That's because cold weather also raises the risk of some not-so-obvious hazards. Here are a few.

Possible Exposure to Carbon Monoxide

The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning is elevated during the winter months. One culprit: increased use of portable heaters or generators. The colorless and odorless gas, which can be deadly, is produced by burning fuels such as oil, gas, kerosene, charcoal or wood. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, dizziness, nausea and confusion. Recently, MSHA warned about potential carbon monoxide poisoning from the use of portable heaters in enclosed or confined spaces such as vehicle cabs, work trailers and other unventilated areas. The agency offered best practices:

- Regularly inspect vehicle exhaust systems for leaks or other damage
- Make sure monitors and audible alarm systems are installed whenever carbon monoxide may be a hazard
- Properly ventilate work areas

Another hazard: snow-clogged tailpipes, which can cause carbon monoxide to build up inside a running vehicle. Check vehicle tailpipes and under carriages to make sure they're free of snow before starting the engine. Additionally, workers can roll down windows to help increase ventilation.

Cold's Impact on Self-Retracting Lifelines

Cold conditions can adversely affect fall protection equipment, especially self-retracting lifelines. Lower temperatures and moisture can lead to a buildup of ice on the locking mechanisms and spool. This could happen if the self-retracting lifeline is left or stored in a cold area overnight or if the temperature drops below freezing while it's being used. It is recommended that:

- During cold and wet conditions, rapidly pull on the SRL cable to verify the locking mechanism is working. This should be done before the first use of each shift and then frequently throughout the day
- The locking mechanism should also respond to a sudden jerk—just as a seatbelt would in a vehicle. Quickly pull the cable three or more times with the cable at different lengths.
- If conditions are wet, store SRLs vertically and avoid exposing them to freezing temperatures

Workers should never use an SRL if the locking mechanism isn't working properly or has malfunctioned. Make sure it's placed out-of-service and the employer and/or supervisor is notified.