

## Employee Safety in Winter Hazards

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Workers face a variety of cold weather hazards, including [cold stress and its physical consequences](#). But cold stress is not the only hazard that workers face during the winter months. Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, winter driving, shoveling snow, working at heights while clearing snow, and walking safely on snow and ice are all additional concerns during this time of year.

### Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 400 people per year die in the United States from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. After winter storms or other major natural disasters cause power outages, alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling, cooking, or working can cause CO to build up in living/working quarters and create a hazardous environment. Vehicles idling in garages can also cause dangerous levels of CO to build up, as can portable heaters that use fuels such as kerosene. Tools which produce combustion fumes such as small gasoline engines, stoves, generators, and lanterns all generate CO. As a result, it is vital to ensure these sources are ventilated out and are not enclosed in spaces.

It is imperative to be able to recognize the symptoms of CO poisoning and understand how to prevent it. CO is an odorless and colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled, creating a dangerous, unsuspected hazard that is easy to overlook. The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. Carbon monoxide poisoning requires immediate evacuation from the area and emergency medical attention.

### Winter Driving

Driving in the winter can mean dealing with wet, slippery roads, limited visibility, and fewer daylight hours. Black ice, snow squalls, and whiteout conditions can pop up with very little warning, causing increased danger for vehicles and pedestrians alike. Drivers should be trained on defensive driving techniques and learn how to contend with winter driving hazards like skids and fishtails. Those travelling long distances or in lightly-populated zones should consider using reliable communication channels such as CB radio, and keep extra blankets and provisions on hand in case of accident or stranding.

### Snow Hazards

Clearing away a fresh coat of snow can be a dangerous endeavor. Falls are likely in slippery conditions, as are lower back and other musculoskeletal injuries while shoveling heavy snow. Clearing roofs and other overhangs can be dangerous for those at heights and for those who might be struck by falling ice and snow. Some workers might even face the risk of a cardiac event due to exertion. Workers should be careful to use proper techniques and protective equipment, and take frequent breaks as necessary.

### Stay Safe

Understanding the hazards that are associated with the winter months and implementing precautions can help prevent injury and save lives. Awareness, preparation, and proper training are essential when combating not only cold stress and other winter conditions, but any workplace hazard that organizations face.

