

Ice and Snow Hazards

When winter arrives ...that means there is a potential for freezing temperatures, snowstorms, icy roads, and slippery sidewalks – all of which present a variety of health and safety hazards. This Safety Alert is to bring to light the hazards of getting to work, walking on snow covered areas, and clearing snow to make a path while at home or even at work.

Getting to and from Work:

When ice and snow are present on the roadways extreme care must be taken to assure your safety. Here are some winter driving tips to increase your safety.

- Scrape and defrost windows before pulling onto the road. Clearing snow and ice from your entire vehicle allows you better visibility and eliminates flying snow that could cause additional obstacles for other motorists.
- Slow down (allow 2 to 3 times the normal distance between you and the car in front of you). Remember that posted speed limits identify the maximum speed allowed when weather conditions are ideal.
- Remember, bridges and overpasses freeze before other road surfaces. Beware of "black ice".
- Be more alert to the actions of other drivers. Anticipate cars coming from side streets and put extra distance between your vehicle and the one in front of you. If someone is too close behind you, don't speed up; slow down or let them go around you.
- To make sure other drivers see you, always drive with your lights on. At night, in fog and heavy snow conditions, low beams may be more effective than high beams.
- Keep a light touch on the brakes. Even with anti-lock braking systems (sometimes called ABS), you should apply light pressure to avoid locking the brakes and causing a skid. Pumping the brake pedal should be smooth action, going from light to firm in a gradual move. Tip toe to slow is a good motto for winter drivers.

Walking on Ice or Snow:

The building management will continue to remove snow from sidewalks and parking lots to reduce slip and fall hazards as much as possible.

However, snow can fall while employee are at work or just before dawn with little time for snow removal operations to take place.

So, it is important for employees to recognize the hazards of slippery walks and parking lots. There are several things that can be done to reduce the risk of falling when slippery conditions exist. Here are some helpful hints.

- Be alert for ice-covered areas; especially outside steps leading to the building.
- Wear boots or shoes with grip soles. Slick leather or plastic soles on shoes will definitely increase the risk of slipping.

- Don't walk with your hands in your pockets. This reduces the ability to use your arms for balance if you do slip.
- Take short shuffling steps in very icy areas.
- Don't carry or swing heavy loads, such as large boxes, cases or purses that may cause you to become off balance when you are walking.
- When walking, curl your toes under and walk as flat-footed as possible.
- Don't step on uneven surfaces. Avoid steps or curbs with ice on them
- Place your full attention on walking. Digging in your pocketbook or backpack while walking on ice is dangerous.

Snow Shoveling:

While snow shoveling can be good exercise, it can also be dangerous for those who take on more than they can handle. Cleaning up snow can cause more pain than just a headache. Snow shoveling can pose threats to the back, shoulders and wrists, if proper precautions are not taken.

There were more than 73,000 snow shoveling-related injuries treated at hospital emergency rooms, doctors' offices and clinics in each year. The potential for an injury is high, whether one uses a shovel routinely, or only once or twice a year.

Improper use of snow shovels, combined with overextension and overexertion of muscles, increases your susceptibility to musculoskeletal injuries. When shoveling don't twist your body, but instead, use your legs to shift your weight, switching sides frequently.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons offers the following tips for safe snow shoveling:

- If you are inactive and have a history of heart trouble, talk to your doctor before you take on the task of shoveling snow.
- Avoid caffeine or nicotine before beginning. These are stimulants, which may increase your heart rate and cause your blood vessels to constrict. This places extra stress on the heart.
- Drink plenty of water. Dehydration is just as big an issue in cold winter months as it is in the summer.
- Dress in several layers so you can remove a layer as needed.
- Warm up your muscles before shoveling, by walking for a few minutes or marching in place. Stretch the muscles in your arms and legs, because warm muscles will work more efficiently and be less likely to be injured.
- Use a snow shovel or snow pusher that feels comfortable for your height and strength. Avoid using a shovel that is too heavy or too long.
- Space your hands on the tool grip to increase your leverage.
- Push the snow instead of lifting it, but if you must lift, do it properly. Squat with your legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift with your legs, without bending at the waist. Scoop small amounts of snow into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovel full of snow with your arms outstretched puts

too much weight on your spine. Never remove deep snow all at once; do it piecemeal.

- Pick the right shovel for you. A smaller blade will require you to lift less snow, putting less strain on your body
- Begin shoveling slowly to avoid placing a sudden demand on your heart. Pace yourself and take breaks as needed.
- Protect your back from injury by lifting correctly.
- Stand with your feet about hip width for balance and keep the shovel close to your body. Bend from the knees (not the back) and tighten your stomach muscles as you lift the snow. Avoid twisting movements. If you need to move the snow to one side reposition your feet to face the direction the snow will be going.
- Do not throw the snow over your shoulder or to the side. This requires a twisting motion that stresses your back.
- Most importantly — listen to your body. Stop if you feel pain!

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