

Toolbox Talks 2

008: Assumptions That Can Kill You: Cold Weather

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Think about some tasks on this job where cold weather might lead to assumptions and shortcuts. Be prepared to give these as examples.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Assumptions that can lead to death in cold weather. On the typical construction site, people don't freeze to death. But in cold weather conditions, some potentially fatal actions are more likely. It's these secondary effects of cold weather that are often overlooked.

Discussion notes:

Some cold weather facts to think about

- Frostbite and other tissue damage are real dangers. But cold produces dangers in ways other than acting directly on the skin.
- Secondary problems may arise from blurred vision and reduction in dexterity. For example, you may misread something or drop a screwdriver into an energized panel.
- Another danger of the cold is the need to finish up and get in out of the cold. This can lead a person to hurry, taking shortcuts. This situation is compounded by blurred vision or numb fingers.
- Along with cold weather, we have more slipping hazards—namely snow and ice. Sometimes, these aren't visible.
- A warm place isn't necessarily a safe place. For example, switchgear presents an arc blast hazard. Staying away from switchgear unless you need to be there is the first rule of switchgear safety.

Cautions

- If you find your abilities diminished in any way, that's a sign that you are overexposed to the cold. But don't speed up in an effort to finish and get to warmth.
- Don't use unapproved heaters, or use fuel-based heaters with poor ventilation.
- Don't insulate work areas with unapproved materials.

Assumptions

- "If I hurry, I can get back inside sooner." If you hurry, you are more likely to get hurt.
- "Warming up for just a minute in front of energized equipment isn't much of a risk." The reality is a fault or an arc blast can occur at any time.
- "I should wear a hat under my hardhat for warmth." Anything between your head and your hardhat's suspension system may compromise your protection. Use a hardhat liner, not a hat.
- "My safety glasses fog up." I'll be warmer if I remove my safety glasses / I can see the ice better without my safety glasses on. Lame excuses for not wearing safety glasses seem endless. None of these excuses will protect your eyes.
- "I can't work with gloves on, but I'll be fine if I just work faster." Astronauts work in space with gloves on, so this idea is silly.

Review and discussion

1. What are some dangers from cold weather other than frostbite?
2. Most of the day, you're working outside and your ears get cold. What

options do you have for keeping them warm? [Note to Presenter: Using a hardhat liner may not be enough. Another item to consider is a simple band made just for keeping the ears warm. It goes around the head, the way an arm band goes around an arm. These are available at any sporting goods store. Ear muffs are also a possibility, provided they don't interfere with the hard hat's suspension system.]

3. If you come down with a case of fumble fingers, is that just coincidence or is that a warning? What should you do?
4. What are some signs that you need to go warm up, even if only for a few minutes?
5. You and a coworker are troubleshooting some outdoor equipment. Shivering, your coworker says, "Let's hurry this up and get inside." What is the real message here? What action should you take?
6. You've got to carry equipment and supplies from your truck across a parking lot to the work location, in freezing weather. What are some dangers you need to be aware of? What can you do to protect yourself?
7. You slipped and almost fell on ice that is nearly invisible. Should you just alert your coworkers to the ice, or should you take some other action?
8. What might be wrong with bringing a kerosene, propane, or electric heater from home?
9. A coworker brought in blankets from home and erected a wigwam around where you are working. Why is this dangerous? Why is this exceedingly dangerous if those are made from microfiber or polyester blends?
10. One of the things you can do to work safely in cold weather is to work short intervals in the cold, warm up nearby (e.g., in the truck), then return to the cold weather. Two crews could work this way in half-hour shifts, for example. What are some other things you can do? What if there is only one crew? What is wrong with warming up inside an energized MCC room or transformer vault?

Participant's Signature and Date

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