

Toolbox Talks 2

051: Unsafe Acts: Cold Weather

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review company policies related to cold weather, and think through what you consider to be safe and unsafe practices when working in cold weather.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts in cold weather.

Discussion notes:

Unsafe acts in cold weather

- Wearing a hat under your hardhat for warmth. This will probably compromise the suspension system of your hat, reducing your protection from falling objects. It also may provide another path for electrical arcing, which is something your hardhat protects you from. Use a hardhat liner, not a hat.
- Wearing polyester gloves. Check the shell and insulation on any gloves. Don't wear anything containing polyester or microfiber. In the event of an arc or flame to your hand, these materials can melt through the skin to the bone.
- Removing safety glasses. You might do this because your glasses fog up or feel cold on the bridge of your nose. It is easier to clean fog from your glasses than to learn to read Braille.
- Working when your fingers are numb. Electrical work requires dexterity. If your fingers are numb, this will affect the quality of your work. But it will also affect your safety. Numb fingers can drop tools and parts into energized circuits. And the fact your fingers are numb tells you that frostbite isn't far off.
- Rushing the work to get out of the cold. You've probably heard the expression, "Never enough time to do the job right, but always enough time to do it over." Rushing your job will probably mean going back out in the cold to do it again. So, you really don't save time by rushing. Worse, you get careless when you rush. One careless act is all it takes to create a tragedy.
- Using an electrical room as a shelter or location for warming up. Transformers and breaker panels, if energized, present an arc blast hazard.
- Using unapproved heaters. Makeshift heating rigs, consumer-grade portable heaters brought from home, and any devices not approved for use in your particular location present hazards that aren't necessarily obvious.
- Using fuel-based heaters without the proper ventilation. Making "better use" of a kerosene heater by closing in the space where you are using it is a sure way to poison everyone in that space.
- Insulating work areas with unapproved materials. Flammable materials create a fire hazard. Materials that aren't flammable may create problems with escape or rescue.

Review and discussion

1. What can you wear under your hardhat? What should you not wear under it?
2. Why should you not wear gloves that contain polyester?
3. Suppose you walk in from the cold and enter a room containing energized equipment. If your safety glasses fog up, should you take them off so you can see? If not, what can you do? *[Note to Presenter: Obviously, it's not safe to work when you can't see through fogged-up glasses. It's also not safe to work without safety glasses. A safe way to resolve this is to turn so you are facing the wall and not the*

4. You're wiring a new panel in an unheated room, and your fingers are starting to feel cold. In fact, they feel numb. What should you do? *[Note to Presenter: Don't work with numb fingers. But don't use this as an excuse to hit the break-room for half an hour until you warm up. Try warming your hands up briefly, so you can continue to work. A commonly recommended technique is to place your open hands in your armpits. This is uncomfortable for your armpits, but it warms your fingers up quickly. If you have to keep stopping to do this, though, you aren't working efficiently. Contact your foreman and ask for instructions. You might need to bring in heat or switch to work in some other location temporarily.]*

6. Why should you not use a room that contains energized 480V power distribution equipment as a location for warming up? *[Note to Presenter: The danger here is arc blast. But the same logic applies to rooms with toxic chemicals or processes that pose explosion hazards.]*

8. If you are using a kerosene heater in a structure that has unfilled window openings and just can't stay warm, should you put plywood in those openings to block the wind? What should you do?

10. What are some other unsafe acts you can think of? *[Note to Presenter: If there's not much discussion, conclude with this. What about slipping hazards and carrying equipment across parking areas or up steps and ladders with ice present? As you go about your cold weather work, be thinking, "What dangers does this weather present, and how can I protect myself?"]*

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