

Safety Topic

Safety News

State Compensation Insurance Fund

Issue Four, 2009



Cold Stress

Working in cold conditions can lead to health and safety problems caused by “cold stress.” You can get cold stress when working outdoors on a cold day; in a refrigerated room; in an unheated building; in cold water, rain, or snow; or while handling cold objects or materials. When your body loses the ability to maintain its normal temperature, your body temperature lowers and hazardous effects of cold on the body could result in dehydration, numbness, shivering, frostbite, immersion foot (trench foot), and hypothermia. Hypothermia is the most serious effect of cold stress.

Cold, wind, and water are the three major factors of hypothermia because they all draw heat from the body. Other factors that make you susceptible to hypothermia include age, poor physical condition, illness, the use of alcohol or certain medications, and fatigue. The effects of hypothermia range from mild to severe. A severe case of hypothermia can cause permanent damage to your heart and other vital organs or can result in death.

How Can You Recognize Cold Stress?

Shivering is your body’s response to cold stress and serves as a protection mechanism by increasing the rate of metabolism. If you notice a drop in your manual dexterity, local cold stress may be occurring which could result in safety hazards to you and coworkers.

If you work where conditions can get cold or wet, remember these tips:

- Dress properly – It’s your best protection against cold stress or hypothermia. The

greatest loss of body heat occurs through the head, so wear a hat or cap and several layers of loose-fitting clothing as well as boots or warm shoes with socks.

- Stay dry – Put on rain gear before you get wet and wool clothing before you start shivering.
- Be aware of the cold and the wind – Prepare for sudden weather changes with woolens, raingear, or tarps.



- Drink fluids and eat high-energy snacks – Snacks provide calories to produce body heat and liquids help regulate body temperatures.
- End exposure – If you can’t stay warm and dry, get out of the cold or wet environment.

By recognizing early symptoms and taking suggested precautions, you can minimize the potential for cold stress.

TOPIC REVIEW

Instructor _____

Date _____

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Employer Education Series

State Fund continues to promote community educational outreach by increasing the quantity and frequency of employer seminars. These seminars are produced and sponsored by State Fund and are open to State Fund policyholders. The seminar topics cover all aspects of worker's compensation and are offered statewide.

As part of State Fund's Employer Education Series, the local State Fund Loss Control departments offer safety seminars dedicated to loss prevention. They feature safety training targeted to specific industries and safety topics of interest to California employers. Various programs in the series are developed in conjunction with State Fund insured Group Programs and external affiliates and partners. Some of these partners are occupational safety and health providers such as Cal/OSHA Consultation Service, the Department of Health Services, and the University of California.

The goal of State Fund's Employer Education Series is to present valuable information from recognized safety and health experts to enable employers to reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, facilitate regulatory compliance, and increase business profits.

The program venues provide the opportunity for attendees to have their workplace safety questions immediately and personally answered by industry experts. The typically half-day seminars are usually held at regional State Fund offices. To learn what programs are scheduled in your area, visit www.scif.com and click on Seminars. □

Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund's Claims Reporting Center (1-888-222-3211) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for policyholders to report injuries as soon as they occur. Agents will do the necessary paperwork to get the claim started and refer the injured to the designated physician or provider.

Within 8 hours of any serious illness or injury (requiring hospitalization over 24 hours, other than for medical observation or where there is permanent employee disfigurement) or death occurring in the workplace or in connection with employment, employers must report the incident to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health. □

This Agricultural Safety News is produced by the Safety and Health Services Department of State Fund to assist clients in their loss control efforts. Information or recommendations contained in this publication were obtained from sources believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is only advisory and does not presume to be exhaustive or inclusive of all workplace hazards or situations. Permission to reprint articles subject to approval by State Compensation Insurance Fund.

Published by State Compensation Insurance Fund Safety and Health Services Department. Editor: Judy Kerry

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REMEMBER TO RECYCLE
THIS NEWSLETTER



Safety News



ISSUE FOUR,
2009

S T A T E C O M P E N S A T I O N I N S U R A N C E F U N D

A Good Time For A Checkup

Now is the time to put bad weather to good use by using it as an opportunity to survey your operations and correct hazardous situations before they cause an accident or injury.

Start by conducting a general housekeeping check of all the buildings – the barns, silos, storage areas, processing areas, animal facilities, shops,

and the yard. Check to see that these sites are free of accumulated trash, litter or other things that could start or feed a fire, cause falls or get in the way of work. Make sure materials and supplies are stored so they will not fall on someone nor collapse if a worker climbs on them. Also, make sure that buildings are

adequately lit and weatherized. Make needed repairs of loose boards, protruding nails, faulty steps, handrails, and fences, pens or ramps.

Spend an afternoon checking tools, equipment, ladders, and vehicles for needed repairs or replacement. Are cutting tools sharp? Are power cords and plugs in good condition? Inspect machinery to insure guards and shields are in place. Clean and lubricate motors. Look over electrical equipment, tools, and lightning protection systems for damage or inadequacies. Is power equipment properly shielded and grounded? Have heaters been checked for defects? Are they properly placed, secured, and vented?

Rainy days are a good time to review your fire fighting provisions. Are an adequate number of smoke detectors or fire extinguishers clearly posted, charged, and dated? Are “No Smoking” signs posted and enforced? Are other provisions for fire fighting such as an adequate water supply, hoses or ladders readily available?

Remember to check your supply of safety-related items such as first aid kits, cartridges for respirators, dust masks, and the condition of other personal protective equipment like hard hats, goggles or gloves, etc.

Make sure that hazardous areas like ponds,

manure facilities, silos, livestock quarters and chemical storage areas are protected or secured so unauthorized persons, like children, cannot gain access. Post warning signs alerting of the hazard. Survey your hazardous materials storage facilities to insure that containers are correctly and clearly labeled.

You can also review your Injury and Illness Prevention Program to ensure that it’s up-to-date and reflects your current operations. These are just some of the ways to convert those weather-bound hours into safety accomplishments to help your operation run more smoothly and safely saving you time and money. □



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The Expert's Corner

Prevent Injury From Backpacks, Purses, Laptops, And Wallets

People are used to hearing about ergonomics at work, but rarely think about the everyday items used to carry “stuff” that may contribute to physical discomfort and injury. The information below focuses on the ergonomics of what we use to carry our smart phones, computers, and other personal items.

Backpacks are used by people of all ages; unfortunately, they are often overloaded and packed incorrectly. This has contributed to an increase in reported back, shoulder, and neck pain.

- Wear both straps over both shoulders with the backpack over the mid-back muscles.
- Avoid the shoulder straps from being too loose or too tight.
- Keep the weight of the backpack within 10-15% of the user's bodyweight. Carry only what is needed and organize the contents by placing the heavier items closest to the back.



Purses have grown in size and weight and, as the saying goes, “the bigger the bag, the more stuff will fill it”. Single-strap purses cause uneven loading of the back muscles and restrict blood flow at the shoulder.

- Keep purses as light as possible by carrying only what is essential.
- Avoid thin straps, long straps, and chain handles.
- Regularly switch shoulders when carrying.

Laptop bags are typically single-strap models, carried over one shoulder. The weight of the laptop and other bag contents can place considerable strain on the shoulder muscles, restrict blood flow, and pinch nerves.

- Consider using a bag with wheels or a two-strap backpack.
- Alternate carrying the bag by switching sides and holding it down close.
- Avoid using a sling-style messenger bag.

Wallets may be smaller, but they can contribute to extreme pain in the low back. Sitting on a wallet in the back pocket can cause damage to key nerves in the back. Always remove the wallet from the back pocket when sitting and/or driving. Consider a thinner, smaller style wallet and carry only what is necessary. □

Kristy Schultz, MS, CIE, is a Certified Industrial Ergonomist with State Fund and is based in Northern California.

Feeling The “Vibes” Of HAVS?

Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) is a potentially debilitating health condition caused by repeated exposure to vibrating hand-held or stationary tools. As HAVS progresses, it takes less exposure to the vibration to trigger symptoms. Although HAVS is usually reversible in its early stages, continued exposure can lead to the loss of effective hand function or the death of finger tissue. Given the serious health effects of HAVS, prevention is the best medicine and a functioning injury and illness prevention pro-

gram is essential to HAVS prevention.

HAVS results when a tool's vibration is passed on to the tool operator. Symptoms of HAVS can affect the circulatory and the nervous systems and may include numbness, pain, white fingers and loss of dexterity. Other factors such as the vibration levels, hours of daily tool use, tool design, cold temperatures, the way the tool is held, high noise levels (which may increase tension and affect tool grip), and drug or tobacco use – can quicken

or aggravate HAVS. When HAVS becomes more severe and crippling, bone disease or gangrene could result. If workers experience symptoms or have been treated for HAVS, they should stop using vibrating tools.

To prevent HAVS, employers should train vibration tool operators to:

- Replace older tools with those of minimal or no vibration

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Practice Forklift Safety

Serious forklift accidents continue to occur with alarming regularity. Yet on many worksites, forklift trucks are an indispensable piece of material-handling equipment. Their versatility enables them to do a variety of tasks – lifting, moving, stacking, and loading materials. However, if the forklift operator is not a cautious and alert driver, the forklift, the load, pedestrians or structures could be harmed or damaged.

Forklifts are as tricky as they are useful. They can be dangerous if they're not operated by people who are familiar with the equipment and know the rules of safety. Driving a forklift truck is different from driving most other vehicles. To drive a forklift safely, you have to understand the risks and know what to do to avoid accidents. The greatest danger of forklift handling is that it might tip over; collide with a person, vehicle or other equipment; fall off a landing; or drop a load.

Operating a forklift is serious business. Before beginning a forklift task, operators should identify the potential hazards of the job and consider the following:

- the condition of the forklift (operating horn, lights, brakes)
- the forklift's capacity
- characteristics of the load (weight, width, height, stability)
- route to be covered (obstructions and ground surface – uneven, slippery, unstable)
- conditions where the load is picked up and dropped off
- other activities going on in the work area

Although California law now requires employers who use forklifts and other industrial trucks at their worksites to show that they have evaluated and provided training to all their truck operators, agricultural operations are exempt from these training requirements outlined in Title 8, § 3668.

This should not preclude employers from taking responsibility to make sure that their truck operators are properly trained for the safety of themselves and those working around them. □

Manage Your Stress

Stress is an everyday fact of life but not all stress is bad. You can manage stress in a positive way when you identify your stressors then take charge of how you will respond to them. In any stressful situation, you have choices.

You can:

- **Accept it** – Keep a positive mental attitude and know that some things are just out of your control; all you can do is accept and learn from them.
- **Avoid it** – Remove yourself from stressful or frustrating situations, jobs, or relationships. Give the problem to someone else to solve. Plan ahead or be more organized.
- **Alter it** – Set realistic expectations. Change your behavior or ask others to change theirs. Get advice and support from family, friends, coworkers, or professional or religious counselors.
- **Adapt to it** – Learn to cope with the situation or view it as an opportunity. Focus on other positive things in your life. Take good care of yourself. Exercise, establish good eating and sleeping habits, and monitor alcohol or drug intake.

It's important for the health and safety of all workers to recognize stressful situations and signs of stress in themselves or coworkers before an unfortunate incident or injury occurs. □

Continued from previous page

- Use ergonomically-designed tools, anti-vibration isolators or tools with vibration-damping handles
- Limit vibrating-tools use, take a mini break from the tool every hour, and/or rotate work tasks between vibrating and non-vibrating tools
- Keep tools sharp and in good working condition
- Grasp tools lightly and let the weight of the tool cut or grind
- Wear good fitting gloves for warmth and/or to protect the hands from vibration. Gloves should cover the entire hand since White Finger Disease starts at the fingertips and progresses toward the palm of the hand(s).



Some gloves are especially designed with padding to absorb shock and dampen vibration. Gloves must fit well; loose gloves will force the wearer to grip the tool more tightly to maintain control, while a tight glove can restrict blood flow to the hand. Change gloves or clothes when they become damp.

- Stay warm.
- Periodically run hands under lukewarm water to keep warm.

It's especially important during cold and wet conditions that vibrating tool operators wear warm, dry clothing and personal protective equipment. And, that they practice safe tool handling procedures and follow recommended guidelines. □

