

WORK IN
COLD ENVIRONMENTS



Fact Sheet: Work in Cold Environments

This Fact Sheet provides basic information for all employees whose work could lead to ill effects following exposure to cold.

This information does NOT substitute for medical advice: it provides an outline of common signs and symptoms which people exposed to cold may experience. Your risk controls for work involving cold should have minimised the risks: however, every workplace must develop first aid and emergency procedures appropriate to its operation and hazards, and make sure that employees understand them.

The next page is a simple form which may be adapted to assist in the investigation of any incident involving ill effects following an employee's exposure to cold.

A quick guide to the warning signs of harmful effects

"Hypothermia" is a decrease in core body temperature to a level at which normal muscular and cerebral functions are impaired. Severe hypothermia is immediately life threatening.

Work involving cold can lead to physical discomfort without meaning you are at risk of any more serious condition developing. However, you must be aware of the early warning signs of hypothermia, and take appropriate action if you experience them – or if you observe another person who appears to be in difficulty.

The warning signs to watch for are:

- **Hands become numb**
- **Shivering is not under voluntary control**
- **Loss of fine motor co-ordination (particularly in your hands – you may have trouble with buttons, laces, zips)**
- **Slurred speech**
- **Difficulty in thinking clearly**
- **Irrational behaviour – sometimes a person will even begin to discard clothing**

Once more than one of these signs has been experienced or observed, you should stop work and take steps to safeguard health. For outdoor work, this could mean seeking shelter, finding an external heat source, putting on extra layers of clothing, replacing wet clothing with dry, increasing your physical activity.

Contact your supervisor without delay, especially if you are working alone, or in a remote area. For isolated work involving exposure to cold, it's essential that you know the emergency procedures and contact numbers before you start the job.

And make sure that any cold-related 'incident' is reported and investigated. Other people will learn from your experience, and preventive measures can be reviewed and improved.

Cold-related Incident Investigation

Employee Name:

Position and Work Location:

Date/Time of Incident:

Reported to:

Incident Investigation completed by:

Date:

1. What job was being done at the time?

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2. How long had the affected employee been doing this task?

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3. What cold-related effects did they experience?

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4. What immediate action did they take (eg. did they stop work immediately, did they seek first aid or medical treatment)?

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5. What were the sources of the cold which affected the employee (eg. low temperature, cold, wind, cold plant)?

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6. Did anything else contribute to their condition (eg. prolonged physical inactivity, inadequate or wet clothing)?

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7. Recommended action to prevent a recurrence of this situation:

(Look first to risk controls which address the hazard at its source: try to fix the problem without dependence on procedures or the use of personal protective equipment.)

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Approved by:

Date:



WorkCover NSW 400 Kent Street Sydney NSW 2000
GPO Box 5364 Sydney NSW 2001 Client Contact Centre 13 10 50
Email contact@workcover.nsw.gov.au Website www.workcover.nsw.gov.au
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