



Safety Concerns and Inclement Weather *-Tenth in a series*

As we focus our attentions on the winter season and the holidays, we should also focus our attention on the safety of our workers during inclement weather. Key issues to be aware of during the winter season are:

- Hypothermia and Cold Injuries
- Sprains and Strains
- Slips, trips and falls

Hypothermia and Cold Injuries:

We are fortunate to live and work in a climate that does not have heavy winter snows; however we have our share of cold and wet. Two major health hazards associated with cold exposure are hypothermia and frostbite. Hypothermia is the lowering of the body temperature due to excessive loss of body heat. Frostbite is the freezing of the extremities, most commonly fingers and toes. Frostbite may occur even when the body remains warm, due to poor blood supply in the extremities. Wearing loose multi-layered clothing and waterproof outerwear, provides the best protection against the elements. Especially important are wearing gloves, boots and a hat to prevent heat loss. Approximately 40% of our body heat is lost from the head.

Although blizzard like weather is unlikely in the temperate northwest, the wind chill factor should be considered to prevent hypothermia and cold injuries. A significant cooling effect occurs as the wind speed increases.

Wind Chill Factor Comparisons (°F)

Wind Speed (mph)

	Calm	15	30	40
Air Temp				
30	30	11	-2	-4
20	20	-6	-18	-22
10	10	-18	-33	-36
0	0	-33	-49	-54

To avoid cold injuries consider frequent breaks during extreme cold weather. Ensure that all staff works in teams to be able to detect hypothermia and frostbite symptoms. Finally, consider whether it would be more beneficial to send workers home during inclement weather, rather than risk injuries due to thunderstorms, high wind or extreme cold.

Signs to watch for:

Hypothermia: confusion, clumsiness, drowsiness, slurred speech, shallow breathing and uncontrollable shivering. Note: If you suspect hypothermia, move the person indoors. Change into warm, dry clothing and sip warm drinks. Be sure to seek medical attention.

Frostbite: numbness of the extremities, especially ear lobes, nose, cheeks, fingers, toes, hands and feet.

Sprains and Strains:

Sprains and strains are commonplace at anytime of the year in our nurseries, but these injuries are especially prevalent when the weather turns gloomy and cold. Now that the weather has turned cold in the mornings, it is important to have a good stretching program as part of your safety program. A stretch or exercise program will help warm up the muscles and decrease the chances of potential injuries. Stretching programs are most beneficial in the morning prior to beginning work, but are equally beneficial following breaks and periodically during the work day to prevent tight, stiff muscles which are more prone to injury.

Careful attention should be taken to ensure that the stretches in your program are suitable for the type of work that your employees will be doing. For example, specific exercises to stretch the hands and wrists would be appropriate for those doing repetitive hand motions.

Slips, Trips and Falls:

With our crops safely bundled up for the winter, there is an increased chance of slips, trips and falls in our nurseries. Take some time now, while you are doing other repairs to evaluate the safety hazards in your facility. Pay close attention to obstacles that

you may normally overlook, such as ground cloth, marking twine, bed frames, and nails. You and your employees should be aware of the hazards of trips and falls as the walking path space decreases within our growing areas. Make sure that aisles are kept

clear of obstacles and aisles are at least 22 inches wide for walking. Greenhouse floors should also be kept clean of algae, water and debris. Ground cloth can also become slippery with algae and mud. If necessary, add traction materials to

icy or muddy areas to prevent slipping. Extra care should be taken to apply traction materials when ice or snow is present, especially on stairs or sloping paths. Employees should also wear slip-resistant footwear.

Inclement weather can increase the likelihood of injuries from hypothermia, frostbite, sprains, strains, slips, trips and falls. With a small amount of time and effort this winter season, we can keep our employees safe; reduce injuries and time-loss.

Respectfully,

Laurie Rogers-Roach
Fisher Farms
OAN Safety Committee Member

The OAN safety committee is looking for new committee members. The committee is a great way for people to learn new OSHA rules, new ideas on safety training and to network with other nursery people involved with safety programs. The committee meets 6 times per year at the OAN office in Wilsonville. If you or anyone else at your nursery is interested in becoming involved, please contact Krista Jeli at the OAN at 503-682-5089 or email kjeli@oan.org.

