

MAFES Dawg Tracks

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Cold Weather Safety

Let's all hope that we don't repeat another winter like last year. But since we don't control it, we might be prudent in reviewing some precautions to help protect us, just in case.

Proper dress and some sensible practices can go a long way in preventing problems that are associated with cold weather. Also, if we know the symptoms and how to treat them we can save the potential for a disaster.

GENERAL HAZARDS –

- **Frostbite** – This is the most common hazard we experience in the cold. Frostbite occurs as a result of insufficient body heat. It results in the body tissues freezing. The body parts most frequently affected are the ears, nose, cheeks, fingers, and toes. In bad cases, frostbite can cause permanent tissue damage and loss of movement in the affected body parts. In extreme cases, you could become unconscious and stop breathing. You could die from heart failure.
- **Hypothermia** – This is the other hazard associated with cold weather exposure. Hypothermia is when your body temperature gets so low for so long that it enters into the danger zone. Just like hypothermia, the worst cases result in unconsciousness and death. One thing that both of these hazards have in common is that your risk is greater if you are older, overweight, or if you are prone to allergies or poor circulation. The other factors affecting these two hazards are smoking, drinking and taking medications such as sedatives.

IDENTIFYING THE HAZARDS –

It is most important to know the symptoms of frostbite and hypothermia so that we can do something about them before it is too late.

Frostbite –

- Obviously, it occurs from being in a cold area.
- Touching an object that's temperature is below freezing.
- In many cases people don't realize that this is happening.
- This is why it is so important to be familiar with the symptoms.
- Frostbite victims usually start by feeling uncomfortable and then numbness will set in. Sometimes you will get a tingling or aching feeling or brief pain. If you feel numbness coming on, take immediate action!

Hypothermia –

- Can occur even with the temperature is above freezing.
- Windy conditions, physical exhaustion, and wet clothing can all contribute to making you prone to hypothermia.
- With hypothermia, you first feel cold and then you have some pain. If you develop some shivering, this is how the body is trying to raise the temperature.
- Other symptoms are numbness, stiffness in the neck, arms, and legs, poor coordination, drowsiness, slow or irregular breathing and heart rate, slurred speech, cool skin, and puffiness in your face.

As you can see, these symptoms aren't unusual and could occur in some other conditions. But, if you're exposed to very cold conditions, then you should take any of these symptoms seriously and take immediate action to counter them.

PROTECTION AGAINST COLD HAZARDS –

- **Dress for conditions in layers of loose, dry clothing.** The most effective types are cotton or wool underneath, with something waterproof for the top layer.
- **If you do get wet, change immediately into dry clothes or get to heat where you can dry out.**
- **Be sure that your head, face, hands and feet are covered.** A hat is critical because you can lose up to 40 percent of your body heat without a head covering.
- **Keep moving when you're in the cold.**
- **Take regular breaks in a warm area.** If you begin to feel cold or numb, get to a warm area. Drink something warm, as long as it doesn't contain alcohol or caffeine.

OTHER SAFETY PRECAUTIONS –

We know that prevention doesn't always work, so it is important to recognize these symptoms to be able to take action to counteract the effects:

- First, get to a warm area; get out of the wet or frozen clothing and into warm clothing or blankets. Drink warm liquids, but no alcohol or caffeinated drinks...
- For hypothermia - Call 9-1-1 for help and keep the person covered with blankets or any type of dry fabric available. Use CPR, if necessary, to keep the person awake and dry. Don't rub the person or apply a heat lamp or hot water bottles or get near a hot stove.
- Don't break any blisters.
- It is important to warm the body parts quickly with sheets, blankets or warm, but not hot water.
- Once the body part is warm, exercise it, but don't walk on frozen feet.

Like the Boy Scout motto: **Be Prepared!** If you prepare for the cold and use good judgment, you greatly reduce your chances of exposure to cold conditions.