

Winter Weather Brings Snow & New Safety Challenges



Winter in Washington means new outdoor recreational opportunities but it

also brings with it icy conditions and wet, slippery snow.

Many companies add winter maintenance options to their list of customer service items that can potentially expose workers to hazardous working conditions. It is important that employers train their workers to perform these types of services safely. Roof and awning snow removal, gutter maintenance and Christmas light insulation and removal to name a few.

Establishing fall protection on snowy roofs can be very challenging. Workers also run the risk of falling through rotten or unstable underlayment and hidden skylights. Finding alternatives to accessing snow-covered roofs is always your best option.

Revisiting ladder safety during company meetings is also a wise precaution. Falls from ladder footing kick-outs when ground conditions are muddy or icy can cause injuries to your workforce. Employers should remind their workers to secure the ladder at the top and bottom under these types of conditions, as well as, inspecting ladders for ice buildup and cracked or bent rungs.

Training documents should be on file in the unfortunate event that a worker falls and needs to be hospitalized, or worse. The Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) – DOSH Safety Investigators will be asking for these documents.

Whenever possible workers should use methods to clear ice and snow without having

to go on the roof. Using ladders to apply de-icing and snow rakes to remove snow can help mitigate risk significantly.

In many residential applications, low hanging power lines from ice buildup should also be on the safety checklist. Workers, as well as any equipment, should always be at least 10-feet away from any energized lines at all times.

While winter conditions can add an elevated risk to these type of work activities, a little planning before workers head out from the shop can help avoid expensive worker comp claims and loss of valued workers. Be sure workers take timeout for breaks to warm up at regular intervals and drink warm fluids.

When deciding on the safest method to complete the job at hand, one might also consider asking these questions:

- Are my workers dressed properly for today's weather conditions?
- Should my worker be working alone on this job?
- What if an accident happens at below freezing temperatures?
- Have my workers been trained to recognize the signs of cold stress and hypothermia?
- What are the wind chill conditions today?

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