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### **Preparing for winter's cold in the workplace**

We've had a dry and fairly warm autumn, but now that winter is here, construction companies need to prepare for rapidly changing weather conditions. Construction is affected by many weather conditions - wind, rain, snow, ice, hail, fog and of course, cold temperatures. Dealing with these elements properly can affect safety on the job site.

Employers and supervisors should plan ahead for weather conditions or changes that could result in injury or impaired health. Preparation should involve obtaining regular weather reports and ensuring your employees have the appropriate clothing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for possible adverse conditions.

In colder parts of the province, train your workers to recognize signs of frostbite and hypothermia that can occur when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. Employers and supervisors should also check that protective footwear is in good condition and has the proper sole tread to prevent slipping on icy surfaces. Appropriate gloves should be selected based on the climate and work activities.

Employers should remember that the cold stress sections of the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*, Sections 7.63 to 7.75, apply to any workplace where a worker is or may be exposed to conditions which would cause the body core temperature to fall below 36°C (96.8°F). This would lead to hypothermia or would cause cold-related injury to the exposed skin, including frostbite, frostnip or trench foot.

Section 7.64 of the *Regulation* requires that a cold stress assessment be conducted if a worker is or may be exposed to conditions that could cause hypothermia or cold-related injury, even accidental exposure.

### **Construction pilot extended through 2003**

The WCB has decided to extend the pilot program capping the experience rating discount or surcharge for employers in the construction industry at 33.3 percent through 2003 to allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the program.

Over the first few months of 2003, the Board will meet with the Council of Construction Associations, other industry associations and other interested parties to review appropriate criteria and to evaluate the pilot program.

When it was implemented in 1999, the pilot was approved to last until the end of 2002. If the pilot hadn't been extended, the construction industry would have joined other employers in the province in the experience rating program under which employers can earn discounts of up to 50 percent or pay surcharges of up to 100 percent.

The review will be completed early in the second quarter of 2003 and will help the WCB Board of Directors decide whether the 33.3 percent cap should be maintained or cancelled in 2004.

### **Coming events**

In the coming months, I will be bringing you information about many interesting projects WCB is involved in that involve the construction industry. Look for features on the Buildsafe North Symposium coming up in Prince George and the provincial Skills Canada competition coming to the Lower Mainland this spring. We are also planning to provide you with information about the certification program for a Construction Safety Officer (CSO) and Trade Safety Coordinator (TSC).

We're looking forward to a productive year in 2003, with many interesting initiatives to help you prevent accidents and injuries in the construction industry in B.C.

For more information on preventing injuries in construction, visit our Construction Health and Safety Centre at <http://construction.healthandsafetycentre.org>.

SEND US YOUR IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

*I would like to include your ideas and questions in future columns. Send your ideas for future columns to me at [dnelson@wcb.bc.ca](mailto:dnelson@wcb.bc.ca) or call me at (604) 231-8631 or toll free in B.C. at 1 888 621-7233.*