

POSITIVE TIPS FOR THE JOB MARKET

Don't let the winter blues turn you blue

By: Aleks Zablotni

It's clear that it's that time of year again. Like clockwork, the days get shorter, the nights get longer and tree leaves fly away as the frost settles. Yes, winter is approaching and it sure as heck gets a lot colder working outside!

In the Bow Valley, there are thousands (yes, really- thousands) of individuals who brave the cold every day as part of their work day. This includes individuals in construction, trades, maintenance, ski hill staff, guides, snow removers...you name it! It is very important that those working outside in the winter months are aware of the dangers they face and ways to avoid them.

First of all, when the body is unable to maintain its deep core temperature of 37C, serious cold-related illnesses and injuries may occur. These can lead to permanent tissue damage and even death. The most common dangers include: Hypothermia and Frost-Bite.

Hypothermia's early symptoms include: shivering, blue lips and fingers and poor coordination. If not tended to immediately, it can progress to mental impairment including confusion, poor-decision making and disorientation as well as a slowing down of the heart rate and slower breathing. Advanced stages of hypothermia resemble death. An individual in this state will be unconscious, will not be shivering and there may be no detectable breathing.

The first signs of frostbite usually include a sharp prickling sensation on the face, ears, fingers or toes. The skin will likely look waxy and feel numb to the touch. This signifies that tissues are frozen, blood vessels may be damaged and reduced blood-flow may lead to gangrene. Once tissues become hard, you have a severe medical emergency on your hands. Once damaged, tissues will always be more susceptible to frostbite.

The above scenarios can be easily prevented:

- Dress in layers. The first layer should be made out of polyester or polypropylene so that moisture is wicked away from the skin into the second layer of clothing.
- Work at a paced rate to avoid sweating. If this is unavoidable, make sure to change into dry clothes during your breaks.
- Work by the Work/Rest table (below).
- Wear the appropriate outer-layer protective clothing including.
- Make sure your shoes are not tight, constricting blood flow.
- It's a good idea to wear a pair of liner socks (which wick moisture away from the foot) and wool outside socks (since wool remains warm when wet).
- Eat properly and often- high caloric foods are needed for the body to maintain its heat.
- Sweet, warm drinks also help the body stay warm.

THRESHOLD LIMIT VALUES WORK/WARM-UP SCHEDULE FOR FOUR-HOUR SHIFT*											
Air Temperature Sunny Sky		No Noticeable Wind		5 mph Wind		10 mph Wind		15 mph Wind		20 mph Wind	
°C (approx)	°F (approx)	Max. Work Period	No. of Breaks	Max. Work Period	No. of Breaks	Max. Work Period	No. of Breaks	Max. Work Period	No. of Breaks	Max. Work Period	No. of Breaks
-26° to -26°	-15° to -19°	(Norm breaks) 1		(Norm breaks) 1		75 min.	2	55 min.	3	40 min.	4
-29° to -31°	-20° to -24°	(Norm breaks) 1		75 min.	2	55 min.	3	40 min.	4	30 min.	5
-32° to -34°	-25° to -29°	75 min.	2	55 min.	3	40 min.	4	30 min.	5		
-35° to -37°	-30° to -34°	55 min.	3	40 min.	4	30 min.	5				↓ Non-emergency work should cease
-38° to -39°	-35° to -39°	40 min.	4	30 min.	5						↓ Non-emergency work should cease
-40° to -42°	-40° to -44°	30 min.	5								↓ Non-emergency work should cease
-43° to below	-45° & below										↓ Non-emergency work should cease

*Source: Adapted from Threshold Limit Values (TLV) and Biological Exposure Indices (BEI) booklet: published by ACGIH, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2000.

For more information please contact
Positive People Placement at
(403) 996-1083