

'Tis the Season. While it has been mild lately, there is no escaping the fact we will be entering the Winter Season soon. In keeping with the season, this month's issue has several items that address hazards common to winter conditions.

## Legislative Changes

### Occupational Health and Safety Act Amendments

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> Minister More introduced amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act that revise the legislation to better reflect current practices and precedents set in the courts. Changes to the Act update the legislation by correcting outdated references and clarifying definitions, streamlining processes for submitting documents and for establishing appeal panels from a designated pool of candidates. To access the Bill please follow this link [Bill No. 127](#)

## Features

### Working in Cold Environments

Winter weather presents several hazards that need to be considered and preferably before they occur. Some of the items you should consider are: cold temperatures, wind chill, poor weather conditions – snow, sleet, freezing rain; and icy road conditions to name a few.

We remind employers and employees there are no specific regulations that deal with working in the cold and there are no maximum exposure limits for working in the cold. The following links do provide information on the effects of working in the cold and what can be done to address the issues. Please take the time now to read them, develop a safe work procedure and inform and train employees on the procedure so that everyone can be prepared and safe.

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 -28°	-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	Non-emergency work should cease ↓	
-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 ↓		Non-emergency work should cease ↓			
-40° to -42°	-40° to -44°	30 min.	5	Non-emergency work should cease ↓		Non-emergency work should cease ↓		Non-emergency work should cease ↓		Non-emergency work should cease ↓	
-43° to below	-45° & below	Non-emergency work should cease		Non-emergency work should cease ↓		Non-emergency work should cease ↓		Non-emergency work should cease ↓		Non-emergency work should cease ↓	

This table is a useful guideline for working in cold environment conditions taken from the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety [Cold Environments Working in the Cold](#).

Additional material from the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety: [Cold Environments General](#)

Another guideline that may be useful is the Occupational Safety and Health Authority (OSHA – USA) [Cold Stress Card](#) (note temperatures are in Fahrenheit)

## **Power Outages**

Unplanned power outages do happen. So what are an employer's responsibilities in these situations. There is no requirement in the law that prohibits the employer from doing business when there is no power or heat. When the lack of power or heat becomes a potential hazard the employer must develop a solution. Each situation will need to be examined to find out if there is a hazard when employees continue to work.

In general, the following steps will help you deal with hazards:

- Identify what the hazard may be – for example working in a no light situation
- Assess the risk – risk of tripping over or bumping into equipment or furniture
- Eliminate or reduce the risk – provide emergency back up generators, emergency lighting, flashlights, make sure natural light enters the workspace
- Review and evaluate any strategies – consult with employees

Conditions of no power or heat are an exception, caused by an unplanned event, such as a storm or an accident. We recommend the employer develop an emergency response plan, perhaps as part of a Health and Safety Program that outlines what is expected of the employees and what action is to be taken.

## **Office Heaters**

Office temperatures can get cooler in winter months and it is common for people to bring portable electric heaters to work. The heaters are placed under desks in order to provide additional warmth. There are several safety concerns associated with this practice:

- Keeping plenty of clearance from materials that could catch fire,
- Overloading circuits, or using extension cords that don't have the proper power rating or using power bars that are already loaded with electrical items,
- No cover or protection in front of the heating element,
- Using worn cords.

The use of portable electric heaters, as an addition to the regular heating, should be considered a last resort; but if you are going to use one then please consider the following prevention measures:

- Before using a portable electric heater contact building maintenance to see if there is a problem and if it can be corrected by them.
- Get supervisor/employer agreement before using a heater.
- The heater should be a radiant heater not more than 200 watts.
- The heater should have no fans or moving parts and be approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or similar standard body.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Turn the heater off when away from it.
- Plug heater directly into a wall or cubicle electrical outlet.

## Winter Driving

Driving in winter presents its own unique challenges; particularly in a rapidly changing environment such as ours. It is not unusual for us to experience mild and rainy weather to only have temperatures drop suddenly and have freezing rain and sleet conditions; or drive into a storm. Three key elements of safe winter driving are staying alert, slowing down and staying in control. Drive accordingly – what are the highway and weather conditions and keep a safe distance between you and the vehicle in front of you so you can avoid situations where you have to brake suddenly on a slippery surface. In Nova Scotia you can call 511 to check on highway conditions or 1-888-432-3233 for local road conditions. For additional resources please go to:

- NS Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal: [Emergency Car Kit](#); [Driving Tips Brochure](#)
- Ontario Ministry of Transport: [Winter Driving](#)
- Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety: [Winter Driving Tips](#)

## Here and There

### Safety Blogs

Yes there Virginia there are Health and Safety Blogs. Here are 3 that you may want to check out:

- [SafetyAtWorkBlog](#) this daily blog is based in Melbourne, Australia and is edited by Kevin Jones
- [What's new at HSE?](#) The Health and Safety Executive of Great Britain
- [The Safety Blog](#) created by Safety Services Company, Yuma, Arizona, USA.
- [Workplace Safety in Nova Scotia Blog](#) created by WorkSafe for Life

## Reminders

### *Safety Service Nova Scotia Annual Conference*

Here's a date you can put into your 2011 Calendar. Safety Service Nova Scotia's Annual Safety Conference will take place March 23-25. This is always an interesting conference with many activities and sessions of interest. Registration for the Conference is now open and may be done on the [SSNS site](#). See you there.

### *Recent incidents*

#### Truck tipped over

A truck loaded with gravel tipped over when it started to unload the gravel due to weather conditions – snow, ice and freezing. A portion of the gravel was frozen to the truck bed and caused it to be unbalanced. Also the condition of the ground may have contributed to the instability. A reminder to take into consideration environmental conditions which may cause unforeseen hazards.

#### Falls

While trying to reach a box stacked over head height, a person fell from a 2' stool that was being used as a step ladder. A reminder that chairs, tables etc are not meant to be used as ladders. Use only approved (see Occupational Safety General Regulations (sections 147 to 152) ladders or step ladders. Also consider how and where you stack boxes or material.

A person fell off the running board of a truck. Caution must be taken when standing or walking on running boards, or platforms of machinery; particularly machinery being used outdoors. Consider the weather conditions and how slippery these metal decks can become.

## Utility Contact

Recently a contractor broke through a residential natural gas line. We remind everyone that section 153 of the Occupational Safety General Regulations require the utility that owns the underground line be contacted before digging begins. This allows the utility to clearly locate and mark the lines. Heritage Natural Gas offers this [Call B4 You Dig](#) reminder.

## **Administrative Penalties**

A brief reminder to everyone regarding the Administrative Penalties Regulations: **Compliance with an order will NOT prevent the issuance of an administrative penalty.** For further information on Administrative Penalties contact the OHS Division at 1-800-952-2687 (424-5400 HRM only), or go to [www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/healthandsafety](http://www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/healthandsafety)

## **Exercise your Mind**

Can you spot what is wrong? There are at least 6 dangerous work habits. Staged photo from BC's WorkSafe Magazine (July-August issue)

Answers:

- No hearing protection is being worn.
- No side shields on safety glasses
- Ladder being used as a work stand and placed in an awkward position.
- Worker has very little control of the saw; kick-back is likely.
- Ladder pictured is too short for access/egress.
- Excavation looks to be more than 1.2 m (4 ft.) in depth and is very narrow. Likely that the excavation is not correctly sloped, and shows no visible signs of shoring



## Links to related Agencies and Sites

- [Nova Scotia WCB](#)
- [Workers Compensation Appeals Tribunal \(WCAT\)](#)
- [Workers' Advisers Program \(WAP\)](#)
- [Workplace Safety and Insurance System \(WSIS\)](#)
- [Office of the Employer Advisor Nova Scotia](#)
- [Service Canada / Français](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety / Français](#)
- [CanOSH \(Canada's National Workplace Health and Safety Website\) / Français](#)