

As winter continues, contractors and construction professionals face a range of challenges that can compromise safety, productivity, and project timelines. Cold weather conditions, from colder air to snow and ice, can quickly turn sound work environments into perilous spaces without thorough hazard assessments and careful planning.

Below are some of the best practices for winterizing your project sites, which will help your operations optimize safety and productivity during the colder months.

ASSESS WINTER HAZARDS

Before the first frost hits, safety managers should conduct a

- » High-visibility gear to ensure workers remain visible in poorly lit environments and adverse weather conditions
- » Slip-resistant boots that provide traction on icy or wet surfaces

Layering is key to adapting to winter's unpredictable weather. Use a combination of moisture-wicking base layers, insulating mid-layers, and wind and waterproof outer layers to enable workers to adjust their gear to changing temperatures and activity levels seamlessly.

Wearing certain fabrics, such as synthetic fibers with moisture-wicking properties, for the base layer helps keep the wearer comfortable by managing sweat and keeping the skin as dry as possible. Fleece and down in the mid layer provide warmth. Ideally, outer layers should combine waterproofing with some ventilation to prevent overheating. This layering approach

IMPLEMENT SITE-SPECIFIC SNOW AND ICE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Slips, trips, and falls are among the most common accidents in the construction industry. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the construction industry accounted for 47.4% of all fatal falls, slips, and trips in 2022. Because every worksite is unique, and winter conditions can change throughout the day and overnight, project managers should implement snow and ice management strategies to keep work areas clear and safe.

These include the following:

- » Set time to inspect and react to conditions before shifts start and as conditions change or issues reappear, putting up clear signs to alert workers of potential hazards or problem areas.
- » Plow and salt access roads, entryways, and workways regularly, and use temporary heating units to melt snow and ice in high-traffic areas.
- » Assign dedicated personnel or hire third-party vendors to manage snow removal and ice mitigation daily, especially after heavy snowfalls or freezing rain. These steps can drastically reduce the incidence of slips, trips, and falls over the winter season.


MANAGE PRODUCTIVITY AND SCHEDULING

Winter conditions also affect productivity. Construction managers should plan for potential delays caused by inclement weather, such as snowstorms or freezing rain, adjusting schedules to account for shorter work days and unpredictable weather patterns so projects can stay on track without compromising worker safety.

Here are a few ways to manage productivity in cold weather:

- » Schedule outdoor tasks during the warmest part of the day.
- » Rotate crews to give workers time to warm up in heated shelters.
- » Use portable heaters to warm up work areas and equipment.
- » Allow for flexibility in deadlines to account for winter weather delays.

When possible, shift specific tasks, such as prefabrication work and preinstallations, to controlled indoor environments to keep the project moving forward during extreme weather.

No matter how well you prepare, winter-related hiccups and emergencies can still happen on jobsites. As such, having a comprehensive emergency-response plan with standard procedures for cold-related illnesses, accidents, equipment failure, and power outages is critical to maintaining safety and productivity throughout the colder months. 

About the Author

Rick Pedley joined the family business in 1979. [PK Safety](#), a supplier of occupational safety and personal protective equipment and manufacturer of its own new FR line GRIT, has been operating since 1947 and takes OSHA,
