

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Selecting a Proper Winter Wardrobe By Edgar Boord

The winter months bring in joyful times with friends and family during the holiday season. This time of year is also followed by the cold, snow, and icy weather that can be a burden for anyone who needs to venture outside of their warm and cozy home. Inclement weather presents a slew of hazards, such as slippery conditions, motor vehicle accidents, and extremely cold temperatures. It is important to plan accordingly to combat the incoming weather and play it safe whether you are on your way to and from work, getting groceries at the store, or simply shoveling the driveway.

Slip and fall hazards become increasingly worsened when ice and snow become a factor. Proper footwear can greatly reduce the possibility of a slip and fall incident while walking to and from your car at home and at work. Footwear with tread that has the ability to provide grip while on compacted snow and ice can often be the difference between an unwanted injury and a simple walk into work in the morning. Avoid shoes and boots with non-aggressive or worn out tread, as well as those that have elevated, or high heels.

Cold weather is also a hazard that can often times be underestimated. Even though you may only have to be outside for a few minutes traveling to and from your vehicle, it is important to remember to prepare for the worst case scenario. Vehicle batteries have a tendency to die during extremely cold weather, which is why it is important to layer up on clothes when you have to travel in your vehicle, in case you become stuck outside without cover for an extended

period of time. For those who must work outside, such as crossing guards, it is vital to stay warm while bearing the cold weather for extended periods of time. There are various types of under clothing and thermal wear that have been made specifically to retain your body's heat and still allow the skin to breathe in order to minimize perspiration. When worn underneath layered clothing, it is easier to maintain a comfortable level of warmth. When coupled with outer wear, such as coats and snow pants, long exposure to frigid weather can become easier to tolerate.

Your body's extremities are also a vital part of keeping warm during inclement weather. Although heat loss from various body parts is widely debated, keeping your feet and hands bundled up can greatly decrease the amount of lost body heat. When selecting proper footwear, you should take into consideration how warm the shoe or boot may be. Some boots contain "thinsulate" or a similar type of synthetic fiber that offers better thermal protection. In conjunction with thermal socks, or even a couple pairs of normal socks, retention of body heat becomes greater.

Gloves protect one of your body's biggest assets. This is why it is important to select the right type of gloves to keep your hands warm. If your daily tasks and activities require use of your hands outdoors at all, gloves with excellent water resistance and thermal protection should be considered. Even though gloves may be warm, once they become wet, thermal protection is lost. When a lot of time is

spent working outdoors in the cold weather, glove liners should also be worn underneath of the normal outer glove. This allows the individual to remove the bulky outer glove in order to perform tasks that involve more intricate finger movement while maintaining a level protection for the hand. This also adds a layer of cold protection when coupled with normal outer gloves.

Lastly, but possibly the most important aspect of winter weather protection, is head and face wear. The head allows large amounts of heat to escape, mostly through the ears and other orifices. Furthermore, the face is one of the most sensitive parts of the body. Knit caps, and other types of hats that can cover the ears, are an excellent way to keep the heat in. Other types of warm hats in conjunction with ear muffs can provide the same level of protection. Especially when braving the cold for extended periods of time, the neck and face should also be covered as much as possible. Neoprene and other types of ski masks are an excellent way to keep your face from becoming wind burnt. Wind burn can be painful and cause other issues, such as cracking and drying of the skin. Cotton and other fabric face masks may not be as effective as the neoprene since they allow more air to pass through the woven fibers. A nice scarf is another way to keep the neck covered, but can only protect the lower part of the face.

Here are three questions to ask yourself while deciding how you should bundle for the day:

1. **How long will I have to be outside at any one time?** If you are outside for extended periods of time without the ability to go back inside to warm up, you should consider selecting warmer clothing.
2. **What type of weather should I expect to encounter?** Keep your eye on the weather forecast and take into consideration the predicted temperature (highs and lows), wind chill, wind speed, and possibility of ice and snow

accumulation. These factors can tell you how many layers to throw on, what type of materials to choose, and the type of footwear to wear in order to prevent a slip and fall accident.

3. **What type of work will I have to do?** Will you be moving around or standing in place with minimal movement? If you are a crossing guard that requires minimal movement, you are not generating as much heat. In this case, you will need heavier protection from the cold and wind. On the other hand, if you are maintenance individual who must be outside for extended periods of time moving around, you may over heat or perspire inside of heavy and layered clothing. This should also be taken into consideration while selecting footwear and whether or not to wear glove liners for more hands on tasks.

Ultimately, it is up to your preferences and personal opinion when selecting the proper attire to stay warm during the winter months. Although it is important to maintain a professional look while at work, it is also important to be functional at the same time. Staying warm can prevent the possibility of becoming ill and/or falling victim to hypothermia in more extreme cases. Proper footwear can also help prevent a nasty fall in the parking lot while walking to and from you vehicle. Be safe, stay warm, and have a happy holiday season.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.