

A Survival Guide to Working in Winter Weather

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It's that time of year – again. Daylight hours are shorter. Nighetimes are longer. And while outside temperatures are falling, the need for personal protection is on the rise. These are the harsh realities of the winter season for IBEW Local Union 701 signatory contractors and members in DuPage County. The stress is real – both physical and emotional – on those who work outdoors and are exposed to harmful conditions.



Although OSHA does not have a specific standard that covers cold-weather environments, federal law does mandate protection from recognized hazards that can cause harm, or are likely to cause harm, to construction workers. Certainly, the inevitability of the Illinois cold constitutes a risk that can be anticipated – and mitigated by employing these simple strategies for survival:

✓ Strategy #1 – Understand the Risks

It is important to be fully aware of the health hazards that accompany wintry surroundings. Significant illnesses may develop due to “cold stress” – a condition by which the human body temperature lowers to a level that makes it susceptible to sicknesses and injuries, such as:

- Frostbite: caused by the freezing of skin and tissues.
- Trench Foot: caused by prolonged exposure to wet and frigid conditions.
- Hypothermia: caused by the loss of body heat quicker than it can be produced.

✓ Strategy #2 – Dress Appropriately

The most effective way to combat external temperatures is to insulate the human body from harmful extremes. Electricians should take these specific steps:

- Wear three layers of clothing that wick away moisture and block the wind.
- Protect extremities with insulated and waterproof boots, gloves, and headgear.
- Don PPE that is arc rated and flame resistant for the task at hand.

✓ Strategy #3 – Manage the Jobsite

Situational awareness in the workplace can prevent these environmental hazards:

- Slips, trips, and falls on snowy, wet, and icy surfaces.
- Cold stress and other transmissible illnesses among the workforce.
- Schedules that do not include safety breaks and warming stations.

