

NOVEMBER'S SAFETY BRIEFING

Cold Weather Emergencies - *Know the dangers of being outdoors during the winter months.*

It's cold out here!

When outdoors, staying dry is important, you can be wet and warm when the temperature falls below freezing, as long as you are active. The moment you stop moving, however, you will start to lose body heat. Once you get chilled through, it is difficult to get warm again. **Hypothermia** (a lowering of the body's core temperature) kills many people every year. The warning signs are tiredness, reluctance to keep moving, slurred speech, disturbed vision, clumsiness, stumbling, abnormal behavior and in the late stages collapse. If you get wet, try to get dry before you go to sleep. Put dry clothes on if you have them, and use a fire to dry any wet clothes. Earlier in the day, you may be able to hang damp clothes to dry in the sun. Often when it is coldest, the air is dryer.

Try not to sweat. Adjust your layers, removing and adding shirts, sweaters and jackets as necessary to keep from getting too hot or too cold. Sweat, and clothes damp with sweat, will cause you to lose body heat fast once you stop moving. **Stay dry to stay warm.**

Don't get the bite!

Do you know the warning signs to **frost bite**? Common warning signs include a progressive numbness and a loss of sensitivity to touch. The affected area will also tingle or feel as if it is burning. As the condition worsens, the pain begins to fade or eventually disappear. The skin also changes color when exposed to extreme cold. It blanches, and then may appear red, and finally white-purple if allowed to freeze. Frostbite can affect any part of the body, but the tip of the nose, ear lobes and rim, fingertips, and toes are the most likely areas.

In mild cases, full recovery can be expected with **early treatment**. Severe cases of frostbite can result in infection, or gangrene - the death of some body tissue due to the lack of blood supply.

How do you treat it? Do not rub the skin in an effort to get blood flowing back to the area. This causes friction and will destroy the already damaged skin and underlying tissue, as well as increase the risk of infection.

To thaw frostbitten skin, immerse the affected part in a bath kept at a constant temperature of 104 to 105 degrees F for an hour or more. This will cause the blood vessels to dilate and circulation to return to the area.

AVOID rapid re-warming; this is an intensely painful procedure.

Do not smoke or chew tobacco. Nicotine constricts the blood vessels, reduces blood flow to chilled areas, and delays the healing process. **If you do not have access to warm water, stick the frozen body part under an armpit or between the thighs.**

When the skin has thawed and re-warming is complete, cover the damaged skin with bandages and warm clothing. **Contact your doctor or go to an emergency room.**

If there is any chance of refreezing a thawed body part, do not re-warm it in the first place. Freezing, re-warming and freezing the skin again causes much more tissue damage than being frozen once. As it re-thaws, the skin turns red, swelling develops, and the area becomes quite painful.

It's in the wind!

Simply knowing the temperature doesn't tell you enough about the conditions to enable you to dress sensibly for all winter weather. Other factors including wind speed, relative humidity and sunshine play important roles in determining how cold you feel outside. The "**wind chill index**" was developed to describe the relative discomfort/danger resulting from the combination of wind and temperature. **Always cover all exposed skin with layers of dry clothing.**



Wind Chill Chart

