

Risk Alert: Winter is Coming...

For the *Game of Thrones* enthusiasts, we are not warning about the upcoming battle with the Night King, but rather the annual battle we all face against the seasonal risks of working and driving during the winter season. Below you will find common challenges and tips to remain healthy and safe this winter.

“Fall Back” - Daylight savings time ended on November 5th making the days shorter, forcing many of us to spend more time driving in the dark. According to the National Safety Council (NSC), the risk of a fatal crash is three times greater at night. There are several things that can be done to reduce the risk of driving at night:

- Aim your headlights correctly, and make sure they're clean
- Dim your dashboard
- If you wear glasses, make sure they're anti-reflective
- Clean the windshield to eliminate streaks
- Look away from oncoming lights
- Slow down to compensate for limited visibility and reduced stopping time

Cold Stress – Anyone exposed to extreme cold or work in cold environments may be at risk of cold stress. You also need to be aware of other hazards such as precipitation and wind while you're working in cold. These conditions can be extremely hazardous even if temperatures are not below freezing. A cold environment forces the body to work harder to maintain its temperature which may lead to serious health problems, cause tissue damage, and possible death. Protect your employees by:

- Train employees about cold stress prevention, recognition of illness and injuries, and how to apply first aid treatment. Click [here](#) for a quick review from NIOSH on cold stress.
- Provide engineering controls such as radiant heaters and shield work areas from drafts or winds to reduce wind chill
- Implement safe work practices, including providing warm sweetened liquids to workers, scheduling heavy work during the warmest part of the day, assigning tasks in pairs to allow for monitoring of cold stress conditions, and consideration to offer frequent breaks in warm areas
- Dress appropriately for the cold and recommend to your employees to keep extra clothing handy in case he/she gets wet (even from sweating).

Vehicle Maintenance – Municipalities operate several different types of vehicle fleets, from patrol cars to pickup trucks to fire engines, which all need to be checked for proper winter maintenance before the first snowfall of the season.

Inspect the following vehicle systems by properly trained employees:

- Brakes
- Cooling system
- Electrical system
- Engine
- Exhaust system
- Tires
- Oil
- Visibility systems



Additionally, an emergency kit is recommended for all vehicles and should include:

- Cellphone or two-way radio
- Windshield ice scraper
- Snow brush
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Shovel
- Traction aids (bag of sand or cat litter)
- Emergency flares
- Jumper cables
- Snacks
- Water
- Road maps
- Tow Chain
- Blankets, change of clothes

Snowplow Safety – Chicagoland winters typically come with a lot of snow and your employees are tasked to remove it. IRMA offers training subsidization for Snowplow Driver Training at NIPSTA. Click [here](#) to access more information. Following are some safety tips to keep your employees and equipment safe this plowing season:

- Angle the blade to the right when transporting a snowplow to avoid chances of catching the curb
- Position the blade so as not to block the plow headlights or your vision
- Do not exceed 40 mph when transporting a plow, 14 mph when plowing
- Always wear your seatbelt
- Look out for hidden obstacles on your route before it snows, such as speed bumps, drains, fences, or hydrants.
- Check the temperature gauge often to avoid overheating the engine
- Don't rely on vehicle mirrors while moving in reverse, turn around to look where you're going

Slips & Falls on Ice – Preventing slips, trips and falls during the winter season can be difficult, but the risk of injury to your employees and community can be greatly reduced by following these simple steps:

- Clear walking surfaces of snow and ice
- Spread deicer as quickly as possible after a winter storm
- Wear proper footwear and/or use a pair of rubber over-shoes
- Encourage employees to take short steps and walk at a slower pace when possible

Looking for more training opportunities to prepare employees about cold weather safety? Check out our videos on demand [here](#).