

>> Cold Weather Ergonomics

It's that time of the year again when the temperatures start falling and outdoor work becomes much less appealing. Cold temperatures can cause more issues than simple discomfort. Lower temperatures can reduce both the dexterity and the sensitivity of the hands. It may, at times, cause a worker to grip a tool more tightly, which restricts blood flow and can cause the tissue to become stiff and difficult to move. These cold temperatures can be caused by the environment that the worker is exposed to or potentially from cold air being blown over the worker's hand by the tool that is being used.

The Effect of Vibration

When vibration is added to the equation, the effects are magnified. Blood flows away from the extremities, to maintain temperature in the core, and therefore, less blood flow is present in the hands and feet.

Precautions and Recommendations

Employers are required to ensure every reasonable precaution is taken to protect workers. This includes taking reasonable measures to ensure workers are not affected by cold stress.

General recommendations include:

- Dress in warm layers, ensuring an outer layer that is wind resistant;
- Cover all exposed skin;
- Stay dry;
- Keep active;
- Maintain a work/rest schedule that includes breaks in a warm area; and
- If extremely cold, consider cancelling outdoor work.

