



Organizational Safety Solutions

Winter Weather Preparedness and Storm Response

Background

You may have property and/or operations that could be impacted to some degree by extreme winter weather such as precipitation and/or unusually low temperatures. These events can cause unexpected freezing and water damage as well as the potential for structural collapses. Winter weather not only brings the potential for structural damage, but increased potential for injuries to employees and the public due to slips and falls. In this Organizational Safety Solutions bulletin we will explore five areas:

- Winter weather planning
- Winter weather hazards
- Winter slip and fall prevention
- Safety tips for workers
- Winter safety training

Weather Preparation: in most (if not all) parts of the country, adverse weather can have a significant impact on Slip Trip and Fall and Strain potential. As a result, every season should be evaluated in advance to help reduce known exposures and manage the risks accordingly in season. Preventative steps and maintenance conducted “off-season” or as the result of regular inspections can go a long way to reducing year-round risks.

Year-round planning for winter weather:

- Pre-season planning meeting: use the meeting to establish protocols and expectations with snow removal company, ensure Certificates of Insurance are acquired. If not using a snow removal company, purchase proper snow removal equipment. Pre-plan purchase of ice melt to ensure the right kind is used for your specific conditions
- Keep ahead of winter storm tracking through the National Weather Service
- Document the communication process so all personnel can be reached, not only for purposes of closing or delaying opening, but also for calling in additional staff

- Determine roles and responsibilities of staff for maintaining the salt log, response to weather events
- Establish an investigation process for every fall or winter related incident. A sample slip/fall investigation form that focuses on fall incidents is included in this bulletin
- Consult with counsel on records retention for salt logs, video surveillance, and records retention
- Inspect and evaluate internal and external grounds on a regular basis throughout the year establishing more frequent inspections during the winter months. Consider use of a standard evaluation tool for consistent practice
- Mat management: ensure that mats are appropriate for conditions. A porous mat outside to assist in pulling off contaminants to walk-off mats within the lobby. Mats should be inspected regularly for rippling and wear and have a schedule for being changed out

Examples of hazardous weather injury-causing hazards:

- Uneven curbs and sidewalks from concrete cracks and holes can cause someone to stumble, trip and fall
- Divots, dips, and depressions in parking lots increase the risk of miscalculation, missteps, and stumbles
- Mat hazards:
 - Unsecured floor mats that can easily trip people
 - Lack of matting
 - Wet mats
- Wet floors in entrances greatly increase the chances of slipping
- Snow-covered curbs make it hard to see where to walk, which in turn can lead to a misstep, ending in a trip or fall
- Snow between vehicles can easily become compacted and icy, creating a hazardous condition
- Ice (ice from landscape drainage) and snow on sidewalks create conditions that are ideal for injury-inducing slips and falls
- Snow removal activities such as snow shoveling, snow blowing, and de-icing

Taking initiatives to prevent winter slips and falls injuries:

There are many preventive measures employers can implement to decrease the chance of on-the-job injuries due to winter hazardous weather:

- Review historical slip and fall trends by location and map out high-risk areas
- Entryways – In addition to mats consider the following:
 - Umbrella cover bags
 - Blowers to assist in floor drying
 - Increased cleaning schedule during inclement weather
 - Wet floor signs at the ready and staff trained
- Slip-resistant footwear considerations with special consideration for those employees with responsibilities on the weather response team
- Make sure gutters and downspouts flow away from walkways to avoid the dangerous freeze-thaw-refreeze cycle
- Repair walkways to eliminate uneven surfaces that collect water and ice
- Redirect any water flowing on walkways to avoid puddles

- Treat walkways at high-hazard times and warn employees about potential hazards. Ensure ice melt is distributed according to the manufacturer's instructions
- Monitor changing conditions and manage snow piles near walkways to avoid melting snow refreezing to ice
- Plow snow below the grade of walkways to minimize downward flow
- Designate safe paths of travel to and from building to discourage potentially dangerous shortcuts
- Maintain Good Housekeeping: make sure any slippery surfaces are cleaned up swiftly. Indoor surfaces may become wet as workers enter wearing footwear covered in snow. You may need to increase the frequency of cleaning or add absorbent mats at entryways or utilize fans to assist with the drying of the mats. Remember to remove signs once a hazard has been controlled; otherwise, employees may ignore signs when it's clear there's no hazard and then slip or trip the next time the hazard is present
- Keep up winter maintenance: if some pathways are consistently dangerous during cold weather, consider blocking off/close isolated stairs, pedestrian bridges and parking lots, or levels that are hazardous or that cannot be adequately cleared and patrolled
- Properly light all working areas: make sure pathways are always well-lit, both indoors and outdoors. Lack of sufficient lighting can make it very difficult to identify hazards like black ice
- Provide handrails on all steps/stairs and ramps with three or more steps or a steep incline

Remind employees about winter hazards – best practices:

With a little prevention and simple precautions, falls on snow and ice resulting in costly injuries and time lost from work can be easily avoided. Employee awareness is key and some strategies to consider:

- Walk like a Penguin: focus on your footing, walk slow, flat-footed, take short steps to keep your center of balance over your feet, keep hands out of pockets and off to the side
- Wear proper footwear for the conditions: choose footwear with non-slip soles, deep treads, and wide, low heels; add cleats for extra traction
- Carry only what you can: carrying less or using a bag or backpack decreases your chance of falling — and keep your hands free and vision clear
- Watch for changing conditions: Monitor the weather; cycles of freezing, melting, and re-freezing
- Don't be Distracted: put your cell phone away while walking and focus on where you're going
- Step down, not out, from curbs and cars falls in parking lots are common — step flat-footed off curbs, step down with both feet when exiting your vehicle as surfaces between vehicles are often less treated
- Walk on marked paths and avoid short cuts: short cuts or cut throughs are likely to be icy and put you in danger of slipping as they often not treated or monitored
- Report icy and unsafe conditions immediately: tell a supervisor or maintenance person if you spot slippery areas so they can shovel or salt problem areas
- Spread salt on ice: if you spot a slippery area and salt is available, spread it yourself

Winter safety training

The best practices tips for employees are an important part of an annual educational reminder and can be included on the intranet and internal safety communication. In addition, planned training for all staff will help set you up for success.

- Hold regular winter safety talks and find ways to keep the conversation going about winter weather safety so it stays top of mind. Sample topics could include review of facility preparations, emphasize appropriate footwear, taking extra time, no shortcuts, parking restrictions, and limit distractions, etc.
- Prepare and train all employees on how to report an unsafe condition so it can be resolved quickly.
- Train workers on Cold Stress by recognizing the symptoms, self-monitoring, medical assistance, and proper clothing for conditions.
- Winter Response Team: those employees with roles and responsibilities for inclement weather response are at greater risk for injury due to slip/fall, but also for strains. Consider these tasks:
 - Snow Shoveling: this strenuous activity can cause overexertion and back injuries. Provide annual education for your response team on safe practices in snow shoveling
 - Snow Blowing: can result in strain injuries, but also struck by and cuts due to moving machine parts. Provide education to the team on safe snow blower utilization and ensure the team has read the user's manual and is familiar with the equipment before use
 - De-icing: caution should be used when handling de-icing material. Ice-melt bags can come in 50 lb. bags. These bags are difficult to lift and move. Consideration should be given to use of a cart to assist with bag handling and avoid strain injuries. Ensure the SDS for ice melt is available and employees are trained on potential exposure and response. Ice melt should be applied at the right time and in accordance with manufacturer's instructions

Resources:

OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/winter-weather/hazards#:~:text=Workers%20should%20warm%2Dup%20before,turn%20or%20twist%20the%20body.>

Refer to [PMA's Winter Worker Safety Link Timeline: Preparing for Hazardous Weather Outlooks](#) for additional tips and strategies.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your local PMA Risk Control Consultant.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - *The information and suggestions presented by PMA Companies in this bulletin are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in discovering or identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related, or other laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter them to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies. PMA Companies and Old Republic Insurance Group does not provide legal advice and the information and suggestions in this Bulletin should not be construed as such.*





SALT/SWEEP LOG

Property: _____
(Name of location)

To be completed as needed during/following snow, sleet, or other conditions that may affect walking surfaces

Date d/m/y	Time Started	Time Completed	Weather Conditions	Specific Area of Attention	Type of Work performed (shovel, sweep, salt)	Name of Person or crew completing work	General comments on conditions, etc.*

**** Comments should focus on condition of premises after snow removal, also on complaints, accidents, or unusual circumstances.**

Manager signature: _____

Date signed: _____





Slip/Fall Investigation Form

Name _____ Phone _____				
Address _____				
City _____	State _____ Zip _____			
Age _____ Sex _____	Date of accident _____ Time of accident _____ AM PM			
Lighting: Daylight After Dark Dawn Dusk				
Time of last area inspection by designated employee _____				
TYPE OF ACCIDENT	LOCATION OF ACCIDENT			
Slip/Fall	Entrance/Lobby	Stairs		
Misc. Injury	Public Restrooms	Hallways		
Misc. Employee Injury	Parking Lot	Other _____		
SLIP/FALL				
Condition of walking surface:	Wet	Snow/Ice		
	Dry	Other (if other, what was it?) _____		
Describe shoes worn:	Hard Sole	Athletic	High Heels	Other _____
Description of Accident:				

Probable Cause of Accident:				

Nature of Injury:				

WITNESS:				
Name _____		Phone (____) _____		
Address _____				
City _____		State _____		Zip _____
What steps have been taken or can be taken to prevent similar accidents? _____				

Name of person completing this report _____				
Date _____		Time _____ AM PM		