

Health Guide for Working during the Cold Weather

Introduction

Hong Kong commonly experiences cold spells in winter. Cold weather could trigger diseases, especially among people suffering from heart, respiratory or chronic medical conditions.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Chapter 509) and Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (Chapter 59), employers have a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety and health of their employees at work. Such duty includes the provision and maintenance of systems of work that are, so far as reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health. Employers should, therefore, pay special attention to work during the cold weather, particularly for employees having to work outdoors or in remote areas, and for those suffering from heart diseases, respiratory or chronic medical conditions. It is important for employers to take appropriate precautions to protect their employees at work during the cold weather. On the other hand, employees have a duty to take care of themselves, as well as others, and to co-operate with their employers to comply with the safety and health requirements.

This guide aims to provide practical guidance for employers and employees on precautions that could be taken to minimize the risks of working during the cold weather.

Precautions for Employers

- Take heed of the weather report and remind employees to wear appropriately warm clothing at work. For employees wearing uniform, employers should ensure that additional warm clothing is provided when necessary;
- Reschedule outdoor work or work in remote areas to warmer periods in the daytime, such as noon, or warmer days, where practicable;
- Make arrangements for employees to, where practicable, rotate from outdoor to indoor or sheltered worksites within the shift to reduce their exposure to the cold weather;
- Inform employees of the necessary safety and health precautions to be taken while working in the cold weather. Remind them to stay alert to their health condition during outdoor work in the cold weather, and seek the attention of their supervisors as appropriate;
- Provide hot drinking water or other beverages for employees; and
- Provide employees working alone in remote areas with effective means of communication or other suitable measures for calling for assistance in case of emergency.

Precautions for Employees

- Take note of the weather report and wear appropriately warm clothing at work, particularly when working outdoor or in remote areas;
- Be mindful of their health condition when working in the cold weather, and seek their supervisors' attention and medical help immediately if feeling unwell such as cold limbs, body shivering and having goose bumps (chicken skin);
- Consume sufficient food and drink with a high calorie content, e.g. hot drinking water, hot tea and hot food; and
- Perform exercise to facilitate circulation and production of heat.

Enquiries

If you wish to enquire about this leaflet or require advice on occupational health and hygiene issues, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department through:

Address : 15/F., Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road, Central, Hong Kong
Telephone : 2852 4041
Fax : 2581 2049
E-mail : enquiry@labour.gov.hk

Complaints

If you have any complaints about unsafe workplaces and practices, please call the Labour Department's occupational safety and health complaint hotline on 2542 2172. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.