

Winter Working



Toolbox Talk

Winter Working

Construction work and particularly scaffold activity can be an arduous task at the best of times and the deterioration in weather conditions during the winter months can bring additional risks.

Temperature – is there a legal minimum?

Whilst there is a legal minimum temperature for indoor work, of 16°C or 13°C for physical, strenuous work, there isn't actually a legal minimum temperature for working outdoors. The HSE has no specific guidance for working below 13°C so a "Thermal Comfort Risk Assessment" based on relevant British Standards* will likely aid compliance with the law.

PPE & Clothing

Low temperatures and wind chill can cause hypothermia and reduce dexterity and alertness. Up to 40% of body heat lost is through the head, so it is important to keep dry and wear appropriate PPE and clothing.

Appropriate Safety Gloves and wet weather clothing should be provided to you if it is deemed necessary in the risk assessment.

Wearing loose layers has been proven to increase heat retention as heat gets trapped within the layers. Self-wicking fabrics draw moisture away from you whilst fabrics like wool holds moisture, meaning wool isn't the best option. Wet cloths and gloves need to be kept dry and replaced often.

Safety Glasses often fog up in cold, wet weather. Anti-fog wipes, sprays or anti-fog lenses should be considered as if you keep taking glasses off to wipe away fog then they aren't protecting you.

Scaffolding Activities

At the start of each day, the leader of the scaffolding gang and principal contractor must ensure that scaffold platforms, including ladders and stair towers are cleared of snow and ice to ensure safe access and egress to all places of work. Ensuring that scaffold boards have defrosted to avoid slip / trip hazards.

Scaffold tube and boards should not be passed or "chained" up or down the scaffold whilst covered in frost or ice. This obviously increases the risk of materials falling during common everyday tasks.

Every person has a legal responsibility to ensure that they do not put themselves or others including members of the public and other trades in danger, especially during adverse weather conditions.

Winter, along with snow, rain and ice often comes with high winds. Boards, sheeting and any loose materials stores on the scaffold must be secured as safely as possible.

There is no hard and fast rule regarding wind and at what speeds work at height must stop, but the HSE suggest that at 23mph, wind can cause individuals at height to lose their balance. The decision as to whether it is safe to proceed should be taken dynamically on the job as local conditions (including the presence and shape of other buildings in the vicinity) can have an effect. The leader of the scaffold gang should be empowered to make this decision and the table on the following page will help him/her to do this.

Other Factors to Consider

Shorter days and lack of light – workplaces should be adequately illuminated and in some situations, and temporary task lighting may be required. The lower levels of visibility increase the importance of hi visibility clothing.

Frequency of rest breaks – these may need to be increased to ensure workers' performance remains at the optimum levels.

Further Reading

[HSE Thermal Comfort Checklist](#)

* Refer to Simian for Advice, if required

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Table for Estimating Wind Speeds

Wind Force number	Description of wind	Wind locally	Speed mph	Speed m/sec
0	Calm	Calm, smoke rises vertically.	1	0-1
1	Light air	Direction of wind shown by smoke drift, but not by wind or weather vanes.	1-3	1-2
2	Light breeze	Wind felt on face. Leaves rustle. Wind or weather vanes move.	4-7	2-3
3	Gentle breeze	Leaves and small twigs in constant motion. Wind extends light flags.	8-12	3-5
4	Moderate breeze	Wind raises dust and loose paper. Small branches move.	13-18	5-8
5	Fresh breeze	Small trees in leaf begin to sway. Little crested wavelets form on inland waters.	19-24	8-11
6	Strong breeze	Large branches in motion. Umbrellas used with some difficulty.	25-31	11-14
7	Near gale	Whole trees in motion. Becoming difficult to walk against the wind.	32-38	14-17
8	Gale	Twigs break off trees. Progress is generally impeded.	39-46	17-21
9	Strong gale	Chimney pots, slates and tiles may be blown off.	47-54	21-24

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Feedback:

Briefing Acknowledgement

Name	Date	Signed