

Working Safely in Cold Weather Conditions

Advice to employers

Advice to employers The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) have said employers must be flexible during harsh weather conditions, such as snow and ice, and should not force staff to “risk life and limb” getting to work.

When such weather conditions occur this can result in schools across the Island closing, leaving many parents with child care problems. In such severe weather conditions buses can be cancelled and motorists are often warned only to make essential journeys. In such circumstances many staff may be unable to get to work or opt to work from home. Whilst many people may not be able to travel to their workplaces, business does not have to stop entirely in such circumstances. With good business continuity and safety policies in place, together with a good communication system, business can continue to operate. Employers have many things to consider including safety within the workplace, minimum temperatures, arrangements if the workplace needs to close, business continuity, the safety of employees (plus the general public and contractors) and ensuring good communication. These aspects are featured in more detail below.

Key considerations

- Communication is important, make sure everyone is kept informed of changes.
- Contractors, freelancers and part-time workers must also be considered.
- It is important to consider inside temperature and comfort for staff. Workplaces should not drop below 16 degrees Celsius (13 degrees Celsius where work requires severe physical effort). The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE) suggests a range from 20°C to 24°C for offices involving sedentary tasks.
- Snow and ice are hazards that may result in slips, trips and falls. Advise staff of the correct footwear, use signage where possible and ensure that icy surfaces are gritted accordingly.
- Driving to and from the workplace can be dangerous in times of extreme weather.

It may be necessary to make quick decisions about closing the workplace or sending people home. These should be made considering risks and hazards, likelihood and severity ensuring safety as far as is reasonably practicable. Directors may wish to make decisions in conjunction with health and safety advisers, employee representatives and facilities managers.



Advice to those with responsibility for health and safety

At times of extreme and dangerous weather it is essential that communication is retained throughout the workforce. Staff must be instructed as to what the employer's policy is, how to follow it and who to communicate with if they have any queries. A model policy has been created, which can be tailor-made for your department's individual needs.

A number of health and safety issues may need to be addressed:

Risk assessment – it must be made clear who takes the final decision in times of bad weather, in terms of when people should leave the workplace or if a workplace should close down entirely for a specified period. The five stages of risk assessment should be applied, as always, and a decision made by a competent person.

Safety in the workplace – with fewer people in the workplace, lone working situations may arise, and it should be ensured that communication is maintained with any employees in this situation and that non-essential high risk tasks are avoided. Consideration should also be given to vulnerable workers such as pregnant and disabled employees.

Further information

- The TUC has also advised companies to ensure they have a bad weather policy, which sets out what is expected of staff and what they should do when snow, ice and a lack of transport prevents them from getting to work. A model policy is available, which can be tailored-made to your department's needs.
- Information on weather conditions is available from the Met Office at: <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/> or local radio broadcasts.
- Public transport service updates and information on disruptions due to the snow and ice conditions are available through local media along with traffic updates

Emergency arrangements – due to low staffing levels, consideration needs to be given to arrangements for dealing with emergencies such as failures of safety critical systems, persons trapped in lifts, first aid incidents, fire evacuations, power failures, workplace temperatures falling below the minimum guidelines, etc (See the 'Key considerations' box).

Working from home – home working might be seen as a solution, and since the Covid-19 pandemic is now more widely practised. However, employers should be aware that it is also their responsibility to ensure their employees' health and safety if they are working from home. Home working risk assessments should be undertaken to ensure employees are able to comfortably and



safely work from home. It is often best to undertake these on the potential working environment as part of contingency planning before bad weather strikes.

Driving for work – it should be ensured drivers are allowed extra time to complete journeys and factor in alternative routes, and that they are not pressurised to complete any journeys made dangerously difficult by the weather.

Slips, trips and falls – walking to and from car parks or between buildings at work during this weather requires special attention to avoid slipping and falling. Slips and falls are some of the most frequent types of injuries during the winter months. Main pathways and steps should be cleared as far as possible of snow and ice to allow safe access to buildings. Employees should be reminded to remove as much snow and water from their boots as they can when entering buildings as water from melting ice on the floor can also lead to slippery conditions.

Updates – any news specific to the department should be sent out by email and published on any intranet sites.

Employees trapped at work – employers should keep an eye on the weather throughout the day, taking care that employees don't get trapped at work and put at risk if snow starts to fall. Communication needs to be in place to ensure a work place can be closed down relatively quickly if necessary. It is also worth having in place contingency plans should employees be trapped at work or unable to travel home.

Contractors – it is important to consider contractors, freelancers and part time staff. Make sure you have contact details for all people who usually work within your workplace.

Members of the public – ensure that suitable and sufficient signage is displayed to inform the public of important information.

PPE – if outdoor working is required, ensure that suitable and sufficient PPE is provided, including suitable gloves. Systems of work for outdoor activities should take account of reasonably foreseeable poor weather.

Advice to employees

It is important that all members of staff are vigilant at times of extreme weather. Your health and safety and the safety of those around is your responsibility too.



Use caution, and contact your health and safety representative if you are unsure about anything. If you feel that your safety or the safety of others around you is compromised, you must inform your manager.

Policies – make sure that you have read and understood any policies or advice issued by your manager about local rules and procedures in the event of snow and ice.

Travel – when travelling to work, leave extra time for your journey and ensure that your car is prepared for the weather.

Slips trips and falls – walking to and from car parks or between buildings at work during cold and icy weather requires special attention to avoid slipping and falling. Slips and falls are some of the most frequent types of injuries during the winter months.

Avoid boots or shoes with smooth soles and heels, such as plastic and leather soles, and instead wear a pair of well insulated boots with good rubber treads and walk slowly and with shorter steps when on icy surfaces. Main pathways and steps should be cleared as far as possible of snow and ice to allow safe access to buildings. Remove as much snow and water from your boots as you can when entering buildings, as water from melting ice on the floor can also lead to slippery conditions.

Updates – any specific news from your department will be sent out by your manager/team leader.

Contact – ensure you have contact details of people within your Department, in case you are unable to go into work.

Home and lone working – ensure you have read and understood information concerning home or lone working.



“If you feel that your safety or the safety of others around you is compromised, you must inform your employer”



Parking – where possible park in a safe and well-lit area, within a short walking distance of your workplace.

Clothing and footwear – ensure that you have ample extra clothing and suitable footwear for ice and snow. Footwear should have grips. Heels should be avoided in deep snow and ice.

Travelling home – when leaving your workplace in bad weather, make sure you have a fully charged mobile telephone, plenty of fuel, and that you have consulted relevant guidance. You should inform someone of what time you can expect to arrive, taking into account hazardous driving conditions.

Further information

Information, travel advice and traffic updates are posted using social media platforms and local radio stations.

- Manx Radio
- Isle of Man Constabulary Facebook Page

Information on weather conditions is available from the Ronaldsway Met Office at: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/> or local radio broadcasts.

