

How a Managed Uniform Program Can Help Protect Outdoor Workers from “Cold Stress”

December 11, 2017

Dressing properly is key for protecting workers during the cold winter months

WILMINGTON, Mass., Dec. 11, 2017 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- As the winter season begins, keeping outdoor workers safe from falling air temperatures is a priority for many businesses across the country, even in regions that are not accustomed to frigid winter weather. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), exposing workers to extreme cold, near freezing temperatures, wet conditions, and wind chill are all considered risk factors for “cold stress.”

A photo accompanying this announcement is available at:
<http://www.globenewswire.com/NewsRoom/AttachmentNg/27509351-1b7c-412b-99de-b3da328814cc>

Cold stress occurs when a person’s skin temperature decreases, and eventually the internal body temperature along with it. When the body is unable to warm itself, serious cold-related illnesses and injuries may occur, along with the potential for permanent tissue damage and even death. The most common types of cold stress include hypothermia, frostbite, and trench foot.

Colder temperatures can affect any outdoor worker exposed for extended periods, including those who work in facility management, snow cleanup, construction, electric utilities, and roadside-related. Other workers who could be affected include those working in transit, baggage handling, water transportation, landscaping services, and oil and gas operations. Cold stress can also be brought on when outdoor workers return to work after a long absence, or for others who are new to the job, as their bodies may not be as accustomed to the weather conditions.

Even workers in warmer climates (above freezing) can be exposed to the effects of cold stress from increased and sustained wind speeds, which can cause heat to leave the body more rapidly (wind chill effect). Wetness or dampness caused by precipitation and body sweat can also facilitate heat loss from the body.

Dressing properly, including selecting garments constructed with protective fabrics if applicable, is one of the best ways for businesses to help prevent cold stress from affecting their workers. “Cotton, for example, is not always the best choice for outdoor workers since it can lose its warming value when it becomes wet from either inclement weather or perspiration. Instead, outdoor workers are often better protected when wearing other fabric options, such as those with built-in technology to wick away moisture, helping keep wearers warm and dry all day long,” says Adam Soreff, director of marketing and communications at UniFirst Corporation (NYSE:UNF), a North American leader in providing customized work uniform programs, corporate attire, and facility service products. “A managed workwear program can take the worry out of ensuring workers are properly dressed for the elements during the winter season, helping defend them from cold stress, and keeping them on the job, happy, and productive.”

Businesses can benefit from a managed uniform program by receiving expert assistance from a reputable service provider who can review work requirements and help identify the right types of garments needed to effectively protect their outdoor workers. Other benefits of a managed uniform program include weekly uniform laundering and maintenance, quality inspections, and mending and replacing of garments as needed.

The following are 10 tips to consider, many of which are endorsed by OSHA, to help protect workers from cold stress:

1. Wear at least three layers of loose-fitting clothing, designed with the appropriate types of fabrics, as proper layering provides improved insulation from the elements.
2. Select garments close to the body that are made with “breathable” fabrics, such as moisture-wicking synthetics, to help workers stay dry and comfortable.
3. Choose outer garments that are insulated but do not have much added bulk that could interfere with worker mobility.
4. Consider outerwear that is water repellent to aid worker protection from rain, sleet, or snow.
5. Select outer garments that also have built-in ventilation to help prevent excessive sweating and keep workers dry.
6. Wear a hat or hood to help keep the entire body warm; hats reduce the amount of body heat that escapes.
7. Use a knit mask to cover and help protect the face and mouth. Wraparound eye protection can also help preserve body heat and prevent eyes from drying out due to cold.
8. Use insulated gloves to protect the hands.
9. Wear double-layer thermal socks and insulated, waterproof footwear.
10. Ensure workers take regular breaks and, when possible, warm up indoors with hot beverages (no alcohol) to increase body temperature.



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While working outdoors in the winter can be challenging, following these basic tips and participating in a managed uniform program can help businesses protect outdoor workers from the effects of cold stress, allowing them to consistently get the job done safely.

About UniFirst:

Headquartered in Wilmington, Mass., UniFirst Corporation (NYSE:UNF) is a North American leader in the supply and servicing of uniform and workwear programs, as well as the delivery of facility service programs. Together with its subsidiaries, the company also provides first aid and safety products, and manages specialized garment programs for the cleanroom and nuclear industries. UniFirst manufactures its own branded workwear, protective clothing, and floorcare products, and with 250 service locations, over 300,000 customer locations, and 14,000 employee Team Partners, the company outfits nearly 2 million workers each business day. For more information, contact UniFirst at 800.455.7654 or visit UniFirst.com.

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Source: Unifirst Corporation