

SAFE WORKING AT HEIGHTS IN WINTER FACT SHEET



Whenever you're working at heights, safety has to be your top priority. That means understanding and managing the hazards and risks associated with the site you're working on, the job you're doing and the conditions you're working in, and that includes the weather.

You might not be able to control the weather, but there's things you can do to control the risks when you're working at height in different weather conditions.

In this Fact Sheet, we look at what you can do to make sure you're working at heights safely in winter.

WINTER RISKS & HAZARDS

When winter arrives, it brings with it a unique set of risks to manage, particularly if you're working at height outdoors and on rooftops in the colder parts of Australia.

Conditions:



These conditions increase the risk of slips, trips and falls due to decreased visibility, grip and traction, as well as decreased mobility or movement due to the impact of the cold on your body such as numbness, shivering or stiff muscles and joints.

Winter can take its toll on your health and wellbeing as well. Head colds, flus and sinus can impact your physical and mental state which in turn, impacts your fitness for work.

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Know the risk

Before you start the job, carry out a risk assessment that takes into account the weather conditions and how they have affected or might affect your access to the rooftop or the surface you're going to be working on.

Ask yourself:

- Has there been frost or snow overnight?
- Does an early start mean there's fog?
- Are high winds forecast?



Manage the risk

Develop a plan to minimise or eliminate the hazards by putting extra precautions in place.

Ask yourself:

- Do you need extra PPE or fall prevention equipment?
- Do you need to prepare the site first, e.g. remove snow?
- Is there a better time of the day to do the job? Mid-morning or after lunch?



Monitor the risk

Weather conditions can change quickly across the day. Be prepared to adjust your work plan to accommodate a change in conditions that could compromise safety.

Ask yourself:

- Do you need to prioritise the work differently?
- Do you need to secure tools and equipment, or use additional fall arrest devices?
- At what point do you need to make a call to stop work? Do you have an evacuation plan in place?



If it's not safe, forget it!

Delay or postpone the job if you need to. No job is more important than your life.

OUR TOP 10 WINTER SAFETY TIPS

1 Think ahead

As the saying goes: "Make hay while the sun shines." Use the warmer months to carry out rooftop inspections and maintenance, and make sure you've got the right height safety and fall protection systems in place for work to be done in winter.

2 Check the weather reports

Be prepared for the weather. Check the weather forecasts for the day and if necessary, adjust your work plan to suit.

3 Know the work area

Make sure you are familiar with the area you're working on. In conditions where visibility is diminished or there's snow on a rooftop, it's vital to have a good handle on the roof's pitch and know exactly where walkways, rails, ladders and access and anchor points are, as well as the position of skylights and other rooftop fixtures or equipment.

4 Prepare the work area

Factor in extra time to prepare the work site. This includes wiping down ladders and rails and clearing snow or debris on walkways and platforms and from around anchor points.

5 Check the condition of the roof and height safety system

The condition of the work site and height safety system should be checked at the start of every working day. This is particularly important following a storm or severe weather event.

6 Wear the right gear

It's important to wear the right clothes for the conditions. Cold, rainy weather calls for warmer, waterproof clothing including jackets, gloves and glove liners, thermal underclothes to keep your body core warm and hard hat liners. Appropriate footwear must be worn in slippery conditions – boots with ankle support and strong tread or grip (i.e. not worn) are essential.

7 Fall protection devices

Additional fall protection devices may be required in wet and windy conditions. While harnesses may not need to be worn under normal conditions if there are guardrails, walkways and platforms in place, they may be required to provide additional fall protection in adverse conditions.

OUR TOP 10 WINTER SAFETY TIPS - CONT

8 Exclusion zones

When visibility is low, make sure fall hazards such as roof edges and skylights are clearly marked using hi-vis safety tapes or flags, or erect temporary guardrails to provide additional fall protection.

9 Slow down

It might be freezing and you might not want to be on a roof or up high for too long, but rushing in winter can be deadly. Slow down and be extra careful when climbing ladders or walking across a roof in winter cold, wet or icy conditions.

10 Warm break areas

Regular rest breaks are necessary when working in winter to limit exposure and give workers a chance to warm themselves back up again. Create a designated break area in a sheltered, dry space (indoors if possible) with a heater and access to warm drinks or food.

Work with a Qualified Height Safety Specialist

Working at heights in any season, but especially winter, demands a high level of competency and expertise.

A qualified, accredited height safety specialist will have the training, experience and the equipment required to handle even the most toughest conditions.



FACT

Working at heights must cease when winds reach 51km/h



EXPERT TIP

"Always make sure there is no ice on the roof before you get on. It's extremely hard for your footwear to grip so ensure you are wearing the appropriate PPE, even if the roof is dry. The ice can be sneaky, hard to see and can sometimes cover up dangerous hazards, so make sure your attached properly and all skylights and brittle roof sheeting are clearly visible before traversing on the roof. It is also highly important to use the systems and gear you have correctly."

Stew Martin- Anchor Safe Installer & Estimator



REFERENCES

1 Safe Work Australia Managing the Work Environment and Facilities Code of Practice (2018)