

## Frosty the Jobsite

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### COLD-WEATHER APPAREL THAT KEEPS YOUR WORKFORCE WINTER READY

Old Man Winter is right around the corner and with him comes dropping temperatures and frigid winds. Any contractor who is called upon to press on in the face of adverse winter conditions should know the importance of listening to your body when it's trying to communicate to you that it is cold. From fumbling fingers to frostbite, working outside in the cold is no joke. Ignoring these signals can quickly turn into a serious problem without the appropriate cold-weather work gear.

Most contractors recognize the need for a good winter work coat when working in a cold outdoor environment. But how many give as much thought and attention to headwear and hand protection? It's crucial to know your options and not settle for less when you're outfitting your crew for the winter season – especially on the jobsite when you also need high visibility gear that helps you stay noticed in your work environment.

Setting aside the obvious need for a great work coat for just a moment, what's the best cold-weather clothing to keep your extremities (head, face, hands, fingers, feet, and toes) warm this winter work season? And how can it help keep you safe and seen while on the job? Not properly protecting your outer extremities can expose you to the severe consequences of cold temperature exposure:

**Clumsiness** – When your fingers and toes aren't getting enough blood circulation, they'll start to become numb. That



numbness makes it harder to manipulate objects which hurts productivity and increases the risk of having an accident on the job.

**Frostbite** – If your fingers and toes lose blood flow for too long, the cold conditions can begin to damage the tissue under your skin. In extreme cases, frostbite can even be serious enough to cause the loss of fingers and toes.

**Hypothermia** – When you spend too long out in the cold without enough insulation to keep you warm, your body temperature can drop to unsafe levels. The strained circulation that started in the extremities starts to spread throughout the entire body, eventually reaching vital organs. A mild case can make you prone to mistakes, while a severe case can kill you.

### KNOW YOUR LIMITS

It's a humbling experience to realize the body has its

limitations; and it is also a sobering thought to realize these cold weather injuries are avoidable for you and your employees. The right winter work gear can help prevent the loss of work and even safeguard you from permanent damage to your health. Protect your extremities with safety gear that's designed to perform in these conditions. These are some important qualities of the best cold-weather clothing that you should look for in hats, gloves, or footwear:

- » Insulation – Insulation is what keeps the warmth in and the cold out, so your gear should have a level of insulation that's appropriate to what you're using it for. Synthetic insulation is one of today's most popular insulation materials due to its excellent performance in wet environments and its ideal balance of light weight and serious insulation.
- » Comfort – Comfortable protection is key for a productive workday. Choosing the fabric and design that's comfortable will help you focus on the job rather than constantly adjusting your protection.
- » Breathability – The best cold-weather clothing is breathable enough to allow some air circulation that helps keep you comfortable and mitigates the buildup of sweat on your skin (which can make you colder when it dries). Look for clothing that includes features such as vented areas and breathable fabrics.

## COLD WEATHER CLOTHES

It's crucial to consider visibility needs on the job. Does your jobsite involve operating heavy machinery or other physical hazards? If it does, think about how you need to differentiate yourself from the surrounding environment via hi-vis clothing. Check relevant standards like the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Hi-Vis Standards to find out whether your hi-vis clothing needs to have certain features.

In cold environments, you'll often be dealing with weather conditions like snow, sleet, or rain. These conditions can make you a lot harder to see, so hi-vis gear is crucial if you'll be spending a lot of time outside in heavy weather. Keep these things in mind when it comes to winter headgear:

Choose a fabric that will help keep your head cool. This is especially important if you plan on wearing your headwear underneath a hard hat.


A balaclava can be a great option for keeping your entire face and head insulated. Just make sure that it has an eye opening wide enough to provide you with an unobstructed view.

When choosing appropriate hand protection for the cold weather, you will need to consider what kind of durability, flexibility and padding you need from your gloves. Some things to consider:

- » If you'll be working in cold weather, the gloves you choose should be insulated with a synthetic material to protect your hands from the cold. If you live in a region with wet winter weather, waterproofing is also a key feature.
- » High-dexterity gloves are a popular option. These gloves have flex points built into key areas to allow them to stretch more effectively.
- » Gloves with impact protection can help protect your hands from being crushed or otherwise damaged. These gloves contain dorsal protection in areas like the fingers and the top of the hands to help prevent injury from a misplaced hammer swing or other light impacts.
- » High-visibility gloves can add an extra touch of visibility that helps workers stay safe and stay seen. They can also help you focus on the position of your own hands during tasks that require intense concentration.

Protecting your feet is another important part of choosing the best cold-weather clothing. Here are some factors to consider when purchasing your cold-weather footwear:

- » Choose boots that are sized correctly for your feet.
- » Moisture-wicking socks are a great idea for workers who are on their feet throughout the day. These socks help draw moisture away from the skin and keep your feet dry while you work, which is crucial for comfort and helps prevent trench foot.

There's no doubt that winter weather imposes additional challenges for the construction industry at all levels. But keeping your employees safe on the jobsite remains the top priority. Providing winter gear and apparel that suits the needs of the season and jobsite is important, but it doesn't end there. Make sure your workers know the signs of the various dangers that come with the cold to incentivize them to use their gear appropriately. 



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### About the Author

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Donald Meeker is the president at Summit Safety. In 2008, Meeker launched the [HiVis Supply website](#) to fill a need in the industrial safety market. Prior to Summit Safety, he worked for a personal protective equipment (PPE) manufacturer with a safety distribution-focused marketing agency.

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### About the Article

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