

Winter Preparation

Hints and Tips

Because every business will have its own particular problems during the winter, the following list cannot be a definitive one covering all possible risk management measures. However, we hope our advice will assist you to better manage the key risks to your business during this period.

Assessing and Planning

- Check your health and safety risk assessments to make sure that they fully take into account the additional hazards and increased risks which may apply during the winter months. Don't forget lone workers and any who may work in confined spaces.
- Where you have prepared 'Safe System of Work (SSOW) documents in relation to certain work tasks, review them to see if anything needs to be altered or added for winter periods.
- Some manufacturing processes and materials may be affected by lower temperatures in such a way that affects the precautions that you need to take. Ensure that you have considered this and made suitable arrangements (including to SSOWs).
- Ensure that your Business Continuity Plan (Disaster Recovery Plan) also fully caters for the winter season.
- If your premises are in an area which may be subject to flooding, make sure that you have prepared a suitable flood plan and signed up to receive flood alerts from the Environment Agency (in England and Wales) or SEPA (in Scotland).

Severe Weather Alerts

- Use a weather safe app or sign-up for e-mail weather alerts from the Met Office at www.metoffice.gov.uk
- Review your procedures and safety arrangements for dealing with severe weather alerts. Check that you have effective and reliable communication arrangements in place to allow you to contact employees (or other groups that you may be responsible for) and who may be put at risk by the impending event. What would you do if an activity or event had to be changed or cancelled at very short notice?

Repairs and Maintenance

- Are there any outstanding repairs to your equipment (including safety, fire protection, and security systems, security or area lighting etc.), buildings, yard or car park surfaces which need to be completed?
- Are the lighting levels, both within the premises and outside, adequate to allow persons to work and move around safely?
- Have roofs, gutters and drains been checked to make sure that they are in good order? Don't forget to make sure that all of the duties and precautions required under the Work at Height Regulations are followed, whether checks are being carried out by your own employees or a contractor – you need to make sure that the work is done safely, whoever is doing it.

Plumbing and Heating Systems

- Make sure that you know where the stop cock is for the water supply into your premises and that it is clearly labelled, along with any other relevant stop cocks and isolation valves, so that their purpose is clear to the emergency services, should they need to use them.
- If, for any reason, you need to provide additional heating within your premises, ensure that you have reviewed your fire safety risk assessment and informed your insurance broker.
- If you have a condensing boiler, as part of your central heating system, and it has an external waste pipe, make sure that the pipe is of the correct minimum diameter recommended by the boiler manufacturer and that it is adequately lagged (and also suitably electrically trace heated if at significant risk of freezing). Further information on this matter can be found on the Heating and Hot Water Industry Council website at www.centralheating.co.uk
- Oil and LPG fuelled heating systems – make sure you have plenty of oil/gas in the tank. Don't let it run low during periods of severe weather as deliveries may be interrupted.
- Avoid storage of stock directly on the floor and below valley gutters. Some business insurance policies state that stock kept in areas such as a basement or on the ground floor has to be stored at a specific height above floor level, so check to see if this applies to you.
- Consider keeping the heating system on in times of cold weather.
- Whilst many modern boilers have frost protection thermostats, those that don't should have their room thermostats set to a suitable level to prevent pipes from freezing, especially at night when temperatures drop. Don't set the thermostat temperature too low, as freezing may occur before the heating system has a chance to raise the inside temperature up to a suitable level, particularly if your premises are large.
- Check insulation – you should ensure that all water pipes liable to freezing are lagged and the condition of the insulation is intact and of a suitable thickness. A useful insulation thickness spreadsheet calculation tool can be found on the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme website at www.wras.co.uk.
- In vacant buildings, where safe to do so, water systems should be turned off at the mains and the pipes and tanks drained down (other than operational fire protection systems including sprinkler systems). Sprinkler systems which are water-filled all year round normally require a minimum level of heat to be maintained within the buildings which they protect.

When Bad Weather is Imminent

- Make sure that your emergency plans, business continuity plans and safe systems of work, are all quite clear as to when and where they need to be implemented, and by whom. Don't get into a situation where no-one is clear as to when they should be brought into use and who makes such a decision. Does that person have a deputy?
- For events such as school trips, outdoor adventure activities etc., it is vital that you have an effective system in place to know, ahead of time, when bad weather is coming, and have suitable clear plans and arrangements.
- If you are not the owner of the premises or you share them with others and/or they include common areas, and you are not sure about who has the responsibility for making the premises safe during the winter period, then look at your lease or rental agreement and discuss the situation with the landlord or managing agents.
- Trips and slips are a common cause of injury at work, and particularly in the winter. Your risk assessment should have identified what exact measures you need to take to reduce the risk of employees (wherever they are working) and other persons on your premises from

slipping over on icy/slippery surfaces (including wet leaves). You will need to consider not only outdoors but indoors as well, particularly in areas such as those around entrances which may become slippery from ice, snow and water walked in.

- For the external parts of your premises a range of various slip-related safety measures may be needed including gritting, diversion of pedestrians to less slippery walkways etc.
- With less hours of daylight employees may arrive and leave during periods of darkness, making it harder for them to see icy and other slippery areas, so don't forget to assess the adequacy of the lighting that you provide in external areas. Other ice and snow hazards to be considered as part of your risk assessment should include: large falling icicles, significant slippages of snow from sloping roofs, or roof collapse (due to the weight of snow).
- Detailed advice on this topic can be found on the Health and Safety Executive website at www.hse.gov.uk including safety considerations during icy conditions and winter weather' and useful guidance on gritting.

Further information

If you need further advice on any loss prevention or risk management topic, please call us on 01384 37 55 55. We are here to help.