

The Weather Outside is Frightful



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And shivering at work is not delightful. Here in Leesburg, VA, we are experiencing bone-deep cold weather and shocking gusts of wind. Though weather is part of our unpredictable, uncontrollable context, we can resolve to be better prepared for cold weather conditions.

Weather exposures affect client and employee safety, insurance coverage needs, and workplace policy requirements. Implement the tips below to dress your nonprofit in protective cold weather gear.

Client and Employee Safety:

- Take the time to salt and shovel sidewalks and driveways surrounding your facilities. Employee/client injuries and pricey insurance claims are potential consequences of slips, trips, and falls that occur due to poor facility maintenance.
- Provide employees and service recipients with information about local flu shot providers. Cold weather correlates with illness, and many wintertime woes are preventable with vaccines and simple practices such as proper hand washing.
- Supply personal protective equipment for outdoor workers who are vulnerable to severe weather. OSHA recommends that employers remind employees of appropriate winter dress codes. OSHA also suggests that employers become aware of cold stress symptoms and train employees to recognize signs of cold stress, which can lead to serious health risks including hypothermia and frostbite. OSHA advises employers to provide staff with relief from cold weather by investing in radiant outdoor heaters, and offering warm liquids and warm areas to take breaks. Lastly, schedule employees to work outside during the warmest part of the day.

Insurance Coverage:

- Check your property insurance policies to understand your water damage coverage. Cold weather may cause water pipes to freeze and burst, causing irreparable damage to your facilities. To generally prevent pipes from bursting, keep the heat above 65°F at all times.
- Be sure you have an adequate Workers' Compensation policy (WC) and a Commercial General Liability policy (CGL). Workers' Comp provides medical coverage for employee slips, trips, and falls in the workplace. CGL offers similar coverage for clients or service recipients who are injured during your programs or on your property.

Workplace Policies:

- Draft or update your Inclement Weather policy to guide employee and client responses to severe

weather. Many nonprofits use an inclement weather notification system to alert staff or service recipients to facility closures and program cancellations.

- Create an Incident Reporting System to track client and employee safety incidents, which typically increase during the winter. Be sure to train staff on incident reporting procedures, what constitutes an incident, and what constitutes a 'near miss' that should still be reported to a supervisor.
- Enact emergency preparedness policies, such as placing emergency preparedness kits in all facilities and automobiles owned by your nonprofit. Consider taking extra precautions if you are exposed to extreme weather conditions, such as storing flashlights, blankets, a radio, and extra jugs of water in your facilities.

My fingers are frozen as I type this, so I will start following my own cold weather advice. Stay warm and weather-wary!

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