

COLD AND SLOW

Did you know we slow down as we get colder? A study done for the Army at the University of Minnesota in Duluth compared the effects of cold to anesthesia. Consider the following decrements that accompany cold workers:

1. **Decreased Hand Strength:** This and other research has shown up to a 44% loss of thumb to finger grip strength in cold temperatures. For sorters, equipment operators, and others who rely on the strength of their hands, how might this affect their ability to do their job safely?
2. **Increased Choice Reaction Time:** That is, people take longer to make up their minds when they're cold. While work needs to get done, let's give enough time to do it safely.
3. **Reduction in Target Tracking:** This is what we commonly call hand-eye coordination. It means folks who are cold have a harder time keeping their eyes on the ball (or on the grapple).
4. **Decreased Memory and Recall:** No it's not just old age. Cold weather, and cold body temperatures, can cause the mind to slow in these areas as well. For a new worker, or an experienced worker in a new position, this could be a factor in performance.
5. **Lower Level of Alertness:** Have you ever told somebody to "be more careful". Research shows this is difficult when they're freezing their fingers and toes off.

So—what do we do?

1. Cab heaters: Do they work?
2. Building heaters: Do they work?
3. Portable heaters: Are they being used in a safe manner? Are fuel sources such as propane tanks secured and out of the flow of traffic?
4. Gloves: Insulated, rubber coated. There are lots of different gloves out there. For extreme cold and wet applications, gloves are available with a waterproof membrane between two layers of leather.
5. Allow sufficient time for work to be done.
6. Allow sufficient time for breaks to warm up.

Work must go on, but considerations for the effects of cold weather should be a part of working . . .

SAFELY, OR NOT AT ALL.

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