



Farm Bureau Safety Program

Working Outside in Winter

When you hear about hypothermia, you usually envision someone stranded in a terrible winter storm. However, a form of hypothermia can occur when it's wet, windy and up to 50 or 60 degrees Fahrenheit. This condition is most common in cold weather, but infants and the elderly can develop hypothermia at temperatures greater than 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

Hypothermia develops when a person gets so chilled that their body is unable to warm up and their natural defenses against cooling start to fail. The chilling conditions of hypothermia set in when the body loses heat faster than it retains heat. Farmers and others who work outside for hours at a time are the most susceptible to hypothermia.

Contact with water can bring hypothermia on even faster, because water cools your body temperature 25 to 30 times faster than air. If you are drenched from rain or perspiring heavily, you will lose body heat faster than you would under dry conditions.

If you have to work outside in wet conditions, you should try to dress appropriately. Proper clothing includes rain gear, gloves, sturdy work boots, and headgear. About half of your body heat escapes through your head, so wearing a hat can slow down that process.

The common symptoms of hypothermia

include: uncontrollable shivering, cool skin, rigid muscles, weak pulse, a slow reaction time and slurred speech.

If you or somebody else is suffering from hypothermia, it is important to treat it quickly. The following is a short lists of "do's" and "don't do's".

- Most people exercise or keep moving to stay warm if they are unable to get to a warm place.
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- You should remove wet clothing as soon as possible and replace with dry blankets or clothing.
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- Don't use direct heat or hot water to warm the victim.
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- Do not massage the skin. You should give the victim warm beverages, but not any alcohol or cigarettes because they restrict blood flow.

When you work outdoors during the winter months, especially on rainy days, remember the potential for developing hypothermia.