

Cover Story

Work Safely This Winter

During winter, the secrets to preventing injuries and staying safe are preparation for and awareness of potential dangers. The hazards associated with winter weather include exposure to cold temperatures and wet or icy sidewalks and streets. In FY 2019, Postal Service™ employees reported 743 slips, 2,475 falls, and 8,098 motor vehicle accidents during the months of December, January, and February.

Prevent cold weather-related injuries by dressing appropriately in the following three light layers:

- An inner layer for wicking moisture away from your body.
- A middle layer to insulate you from the cold.
- An outer layer that repels wind, snow, and rain that can be removed, as needed.

Also, protect your hands, neck, and face, and wear warm, waterproof shoes or boots. Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can cause your body to lose heat, which puts you at risk of hypothermia or frostbite. Frostbite occurs when skin is exposed to extreme cold for long periods and the skin and underlying tissue freeze. The fingers, toes, and feet are most commonly affected, but other extremities such as the nose, ears, and cheeks can also develop frostbite.

At the first sign of frostbite, get out of the cold. Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes. Do not rub the frostbitten area because it will cause more damage. Warm the affected area using body heat or by immersing in warm water; avoid using a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming because direct heat can burn damaged tissue. Drink warm beverages to replace lost fluids. In case of severe frostbite, seek medical attention.

Snow and icy conditions increase the likelihood of slips, trips, and falls which result in pain, injury, and lost productivity. Proper footwear with good treads is essential for safe walking on slippery surfaces. Prevent slips, trips, and falls with the following tips:

- Wear grippers (ice cleats).
- Walk with care and take short steps.
- Only finger mail when it is safe to do so.
- Take extra precautions when entering and exiting your vehicle.
- Use handrails on steps.
- Wait for vehicles to stop completely on snow or ice-covered roadways before crossing the street.

Wet and icy road surfaces, longer periods of darkness, and poor visibility from snow, rain, and fog create driving hazards during the winter months. Prepare for driving in bad weather with the following tips:

- Maintain your vehicle and tune up the engine for winter.
- Keep good treads on your tires.
- Make sure your lights function properly.
- Add anti-freeze and windshield wiper fluid, if necessary.
- Replace worn wipers.
- Clear ice and snow from windows, headlights, and the hood and roof of your car before starting out; repeat as needed.
- Keep an emergency kit in your car with the following supplies:
 - Sand or cat litter,
 - An ice scraper or snow brush,
 - A small shovel,
 - Extra clothes and blankets, and
 - Non-perishable food.

If you plan to travel in bad weather, monitor road and weather conditions by checking local news stations or traffic and weather websites. Winter driving can be challenging — practice safe driving techniques with the following tips:

- Leave a few minutes earlier so you have plenty of time to reach your destination.
- Wear your seat belt.
- Avoid distractions while driving.
- Stay alert and calm; keep an eye on traffic farther ahead so you have extra time to react to sudden changes in traffic flow.
- Maintain a safe speed for road conditions and keep a safe distance between you and other vehicles.
- Do not use cruise control; touching your brakes to deactivate it can cause you to skid.
- Avoid making abrupt lane changes; use turn signals well before you turn.
- Make room for maintenance vehicles and snow plows.
- Watch for black ice on slippery overpasses and bridges.
- Do not use alcohol or drugs while driving.

If you get stuck in the snow or skid off the road, stay in your car and wait for help (if your car is safely out of harm's way). Turn on the car heater to stay warm, but make sure your exhaust pipe is clear of snow. Always remember, "Safety Depends on Me."

For more winter safety tips, see the following resources:

- Safety talk module in the Safety Toolkit: safetytoolkit.usps.gov/Home/Home.aspx.
- Safety Depends on Me videos: blue.usps.gov/corpcomm/uspstv/safety-and-health.
- Safety resources in the Safety Toolkit: safetytoolkit.usps.gov:12.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: cdc.gov/disasters/winter/index.html.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) website: osha.gov/dts/weather/winter_weather/index.html.
- National Safety Council website: nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/seasonal-safety/winter
- National Weather Service website: weather.gov/safety/winter.

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