

Keeping safe out there in the cold



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With temperatures dropping as we get further from the summer, we believe that it is necessary to raise awareness of safety related to the upcoming winter weather.

As I wrote last month, your role in teaching our newer employees will go a long way toward protecting them from the harm that they could meet every day on the routes they deliver.

Slip hazards due to snow or ice at your office

As soon as it is known that the temperatures are expected to dip below freezing, we should be paying attention to the walking surfaces from your office to your vehicles and

beyond.

Your employer should clear walking surfaces of snow and ice as quickly as possible. If you, your union representative or your office safety representative note that management is not keeping all walking surfaces free from ice or snow, a Form 1767 (see Section 824.62 of the *ELM* regarding availability of the form) describing the hazard should be submitted before someone slips and suffers an injury. If the hazard is not abated immediately or if the employer fails to respond promptly to the 1767 (promptly means during your tour of duty, as per Section 824.632 of the *ELM*), then you should file a grievance to have a formal record of the fact that you notified the employer of a hazard, that they failed to properly abate the hazard and failed to properly respond to the Form 1767 as required by the National Agreement.

Additionally, if the USPS did not immediately abate the hazard, you should contact OSHA and file a hazard report in one of the three manners described on the OSHA website at osha.gov/as/opa/worker/complain.html.

The NALC would recommend that you file online and print out a copy of the confirmation. When you are contacted by the designated OSHA representative, you should be informed of the steps that they will take. They might inform you that they have submitted an inquiry to the employer for their response and, in some cases, they will inform you that they will be conducting an inspection. In either case, you want to inform that person of the steps you took to abate the hazard before contacting them. You should inform them that you reported the hazard in writing and the employer failed to respond, which led you to get them involved.

When you are contacted by an OSHA representative, we

would encourage you to inform them that you have notified management to have the hazard abated through the filing of the Form 1767 and that management failed to immediately abate the hazard.

Inform OSHA that you are aware of a citation issued to the USPS on July 31, 2014, (Citation #963008) due to an unabated hazard at one of its Buffalo, NY, post offices that resulted in the death of a letter carrier who slipped on the ice in the parking lot, suffering a head injury. The citation information on the OSHA website affirms that the Postal Service bargained a 20 percent reduction to the penalty it was required to pay, but the infraction remains listed as “Serious.”

Exposure to extreme cold

As the temperature dips, management has an obligation to alert you to and train you on the effects of extreme cold so that you can respond before you are injured. They have an obligation to make sure that we are prepared for our routes and the hazard of the cold that we will encounter. It is not enough for your employer to simply say, “Hey, it’s cold out there, so be careful!”

Management must inform you of additional steps that you should take to protect yourself from the effects of the cold. Last year, USPS issued a mandatory stand-up talk on dressing for cold weather. Last year’s talk is available on the NALC Safety and Health page at the “Extreme temperatures: Heat and Cold” tab. We have not yet received this winter’s safety talk, but we will post that on our website as soon as it is received. Separately, the 2015 winter *NALC Activist* is scheduled to contain an extensive article on cold weather safety, which we encourage you all to review.

New employees

If you believe that the employer is sending a new employee out without the benefit of adequate protection from the extreme cold, then management is knowingly putting that employee in harm’s way. We must not wait for a tragedy before we act on the matter. Take this issue up with your managers before someone gets hurt.