

# Stay safe in cold winter weather

**O**ne year ago, in February 2023, Old Forge, NY, saw the coldest U.S. temperature recorded all year, minus 36 degrees Fahrenheit, according to Forbes. Though most letter carriers are unlikely to experience weather like that this month, it's important to be aware of the dangers that cold temperatures and conditions present to those who work outdoors.

NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. said that one of the biggest problems when it comes to cold weather are the slips and falls that can occur in snowy and icy conditions. The chance of injury that comes along with icy conditions might be drastically reduced when proper protocols are followed, but when carriers are not provided with proper training, clothing and safe working environments, icy conditions have caused serious injuries and even death in some cases.

Peralta pointed to an incident that occurred in March 2014, when **Leo Sucharski**, a Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 letter carrier, died after falling and hitting his head in the partially unplowed parking lot of the post office where he worked. The Buffalo post office had failed to move the trucks when the parking lot was plowed, leaving slippery conditions in certain areas of the lot. Peralta said that the Postal Service's failure to follow protocols for cold weather conditions was the cause of Sucharski's death.

In addition to safety measures being followed, it is important to have proper clothing so that cold weather-related conditions such as frostbite and hypothermia don't occur.

## Cold weather conditions

It is critical to be well prepared and to be aware of the risks that can occur if someone is not properly dressed and



Gerri Kluczinske of Manitowoc, WI Branch 490

is unprepared for the weather while spending prolonged periods outdoors.

One cold condition to be aware of is hypothermia, which causes the body to lose heat faster than it can be produced, resulting in body temperature drops. It also can lead to decreased brain function, making it challenging to recognize signs of the condition. Early symptoms to look for include shivering, fatigue, confusion and loss of coordination. Late symptoms that can be present are blue skin, dilated pupils, slowed pulse and breathing and loss of consciousness.

In chilling weather, it also is important to be on the lookout for frostbite. Most typically affecting the nose, ears, fingers, toes, chin and cheeks, frostbite is common in improperly dressed outdoor workers, and the risk is increased in those with reduced blood circulation. To catch early signs of frostbite, be aware of reduced blood flow to hands or feet, numbness, tingling, stinging, aching and bluish or pale skin. In extreme cases, afflicted areas may need to be amputated, so it is critical to be equipped for the weather.

Another related condition, trench foot, can occur when feet are cold or wet for long periods of time. It can arise in temperatures up to 60 degrees, so wearing proper footwear to ensure dry feet is necessary, even in warmer temperatures. With trench foot, skin tissue on the feet eventually begins to die and blood vessels shut down circulation to feet. Symptoms of trench foot include numbness, leg cramps, redness, swelling, tingling pain, blisters, ulcers, bleeding under skin and gangrene.

Lastly, chilblains are caused by repeated exposure to temperatures slightly above freezing to temperatures around 60 degrees. Chilblains is a skin condition that leads to skin becoming red and itchy. The condition is permanent and will flare up upon additional cold exposure. Common infection sites are cheeks, ears, fingers and toes.

## Prevention

“The first rule of cold weather is to prevent hypothermia or frostbite by

wearing the right clothing and consuming warm food and drink,” Peralta said. “The second rule is to know the signs and get to a warm place if the cold is getting the best of you. Warm up in your vehicle or a warm place on your route when you need to, and if you are experiencing problems, immediately contact your supervisors, or dial 911 if you feel it is an emergency.”

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), it’s important to wear at least

three layers of loose-fitting clothing for better insulation and blood circulation. The inner layer should consist of wool, silk or synthetic moisture-wicking material. The middle clothing layer should consist of wool or synthetic materials for insulation in wet conditions. Finally, the outer layer should be a jacket that protects from wind and rain, while also providing ventilation. Accessories could include a hat that covers ears, as well as insulated gloves and waterproof boots. OSHA empha-

sizes that it’s crucial to wear clothing that keeps you dry and ventilated, while keeping extra clothing on hand in case of emergency.

“If you have any additional cold weather uniform items that are sitting in a closet, we ask you to gift or loan them to our new employees,” Peralta said. “Let’s all help each other get through another winter safe and sound so we can enjoy carrying the mail next spring.”

For more information, visit [nalc.org/workplace-issues/safety-and-health](http://nalc.org/workplace-issues/safety-and-health). **PR**

## NALC wins eight communications awards

**T**he International Labor Communications Association (ILCA), the largest and longest-standing North American competition for labor journalists, announced the results of its 2023 annual labor media contest on Dec. 18. NALC won eight awards, seven of them for work done by its Headquarters Communications Department, the other by a talented letter carrier who illustrated the cover of the December 2022 issue of *The Postal Record*. The contest, which drew thousands of entries from labor unions and related organizations across the country, was for work done in 2022.

Under Visual Communications, first place for Best Illustration went to **Jorge Blas** of Clearwater, FL Branch 2008 for his colorful cover illustration on the December issue of *The Postal Record* reflecting “The spirit of the season.”

In the writing categories, Writer/Editor Rick Hodges won first place in the Best Feature Story cat-

egory for his November story, “Service dog helps carrier on the job,” about Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Dwayne Jensen**, an Army veteran with PTSD who carries mail accompanied by his trained service dog.

Hodges, Writer/Editor Jenessa Wagner and former Editorial Assistant Joelle Dine won first place in the Best Series category for their December “Spirit of the Season” package of community services stories, which featured the ways in which letter carriers and branches,

through their good deeds, improved the lives of individuals and families.

Wagner was awarded an honorable mention in the Best Profile category for her deep dive in November’s “In his writing place” into retired Minneapolis Branch 9’s **Vincent Wyckoff’s** book writing, incorporating his quarter-century postal career, writing process and Minnesota landscape.

For Electronic Media, Legislative and Communications Specialist Madeline

Alvis won third place for Best Use of Social Media for her compelling Feb. 4 Twitter graphic about Thank a Mail Carrier Day.

*Postal Record* Managing Editor Mike Shea won second place for Best Design for the May issue’s “Staying focused” cover, which depicted the presidential signing of the Postal Reform Act while noting that even with that achievement, NALC continues to work on its legislative priorities. He also won honorable mention in the Best Labor History Story category for his May article, “Up in the Air: How WWI pilots built the nation’s airmail network.”

Director of Communications and Media Relations Philip Dine won third place in the Best Column or Editorial category for his July Letter from the Editor, “Mission Accomplished,” examining how a military unit of African American women, who had resolved WWII mail backlogs in England and France, later became the first female unit to receive our nation’s top civilian honor, the Congressional Gold Medal.

NALC’s five awards in the writing categories surpassed those of other unions, including some of the nation’s largest. **PR**

