

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012



Cold Weather Guidance

Essex County Council



Contents

- 1.0 [Keeping warm](#)
- 2.0 [Vulnerable groups](#)
- 3.0 [Snow and ice advice](#)
- 4.0 [Travel advice](#)
- 5.0 [Outdoor workers](#)
- 6.0 [Minimum working temperatures](#)
- 7.0 [Extreme circumstances](#)
- 8.0 [Failure of heating](#)
- 9.0 [Useful resources](#)

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012

1.0 – Keeping warm

Keeping warm during the winter months is an absolute necessity. There is a significant increase in the number of deaths in the UK during winter months and many are attributed to lower temperatures.

Keeping warm at work can be achieved in a number of ways –

- Keep temperatures at work above 16-18°C (covered in **6.0**).
- Keeping doors and windows shut, to prevent draughts, will help to maintain a warm temperature.
- Eating regularly and consuming hot beverages will help to keep energy levels and body temperature stable.
- Wearing several light layers of clothing (as opposed to one thick layer) will help to maintain a safe body temperature.
- Staying active is very important – small things like getting up to get a hot drink or going to talk to someone instead of phoning can make a difference.

When outside it is advised that you only remain out there for as long as is necessary. Minimising the amount of time you spend outside can help to reduce the chance of developing any cold related illnesses. Attempt to travel at warmer times of the day, anywhere around 11:00-15:00, as temperatures can often fall below zero during nights and early mornings.

2.0 – Vulnerable groups

Particularly vulnerable groups during colder months include:

- Babies, toddlers and very young children
- Expectant mothers
- Older people
- People with pre-existing health conditions (particularly conditions affecting the heart)
- People with issues relating to mobility

Where service users fall into any of these categories, staff should take extra caution and special exceptions should be made to ensure they remain safe and warm. Temperatures may need to be higher than those advised in sections 1 ([Keeping Warm](#)) and 6 ([Minimum Working Temperatures](#)).

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012

3.0 - Snow and ice advice

The Met Office have provided advice about how to properly remove snow and ice, which may be helpful for caretakers and others responsible for premises –

- Pay extra attention to clearing snow and ice from steps and steep pathways - you might need to use more salt on these areas
- Use salt or sand - not water
- Don't make the pathways more dangerous by causing them to refreeze. If you use water to melt the snow, it may refreeze and turn to black ice. Black ice increases the risk of injuries as it is invisible and very slippery.
- You can melt snow or prevent black ice by spreading some salt on the area you have cleared. You can use ordinary table or dishwasher salt - a tablespoon for each square metre you clear should work or the salt found in salting bins for paths.
- Be careful not to spread salt on plants or grass as it may damage them.
- If you don't have enough salt, you can also use sand or ash. These won't stop the path icing over as effectively as salt, but will provide good grip underfoot.

4.0 – Travel advice

Before setting off for a journey, make sure to check the following things –

- Check the local weather forecast to see if it is safe to travel – if it is snowing and travel is essential attempt to drive on gritted roads. A map is available on the Essex County Council website showing the location of gritting lorries and what roads they have gritted (link can be found under 9.0)
- Make sure to have a winter kit in your vehicle, items you should carry in your vehicle include warm clothes, an ice scraper, a shovel, jump leads, and a first aid kit.
- Allow extra time for your journey

Travel should be avoided if possible, but if it is essential the guidance provided by the Met Office should be beneficial –

- Steep hills and exposed roads are also likely to present more challenging driving conditions in snow and ice, so if you could avoid these it might make your journey easier.
- Clear any snow off all the windows and the roof of the vehicle before you drive away.
- Watch out for icy conditions - look for clues such as ice on the pavement or on your windscreen before you start your journey and take extra care.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012

- Try not to brake suddenly - it may lock up your wheels and you could skid further.
- Leave extra space between you and other vehicles. Take even more care looking out for others that may not be able to stop and be extra cautious at road junctions where road markings may not be visible.
- Look out for winter service vehicles spreading salt or using snow ploughs. They have flashing amber beacons and travel at slower speeds - around 40 mph. Stay well back because salt or spray can be thrown across the road. Do not overtake unless it is safe to do so - there may be uncleared snow on the road ahead.

5.0 – Outdoor workers

The HSE have produced many documents and web pages relating to working outside in cold temperatures (a few of which are listed under **9.0**). Advice they have provided for outdoor workers in cold conditions include -

- Ensure the personal protective equipment issued is appropriate.
- Provide mobile facilities for warming up, and encourage the drinking of warm fluids such as soup or hot drinks.
- Introduce more frequent rest breaks.
- Consider delaying the work – can it be undertaken at warmer times of the year without compromising on safety?
- Educate workers about recognising the early symptoms of **cold stress**.

Cold stress can begin to occur when a person is exposed to low temperatures for a prolonged period of time. Early symptoms of cold stress, or hypothermia, include –

- Shivering
- Fatigue
- Loss of coordination
- Confusion and disorientation

Symptoms may persist or progress if a person does not immediately seek a warm, dry place. Symptoms of cold stress that appear later include –

- Dilated pupils
- Blue skin
- Slowed pulse and breathing
- No shivering
- Loss of consciousness

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012

Outdoor workers also need to take into account other points made earlier in the document and employers need to ensure that working areas are safe.

6.0 – Minimum working temperatures

The minimum temperatures for workplaces are:

- 16°C at the start of work and maintained throughout the day.
- 18°C for students at school.
- Or 13°C if much of the work involves rigorous physical effort.

The HSE advise “During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable.” Employers should make an effort to keep temperatures at this level and to keep employees safe and comfortable.

If based in an office environment, an employer can follow some of the advice listed in **1.0** and can also take the following steps to warm up the office:

- Provide adequate heating, including extra heaters if required.
- Reduce draughts.
- Provide appropriate insulating floor covering or protective footwear if employees are expected to stand for extended periods of time.
- Introduce alternative working patterns such as flexible working to minimise employee exposure to a cold workplace, if temperatures are extreme.

7.0 – Extreme Circumstances

In some circumstances there may be extreme weather conditions, for example, there may be a storm or gale force winds. The Met Office has produced a comprehensive guide on what to do when faced with these conditions. There are 3 stages – before, during and after the storm – they will all be covered below.

Before

- Secure loose objects such as ladders, garden furniture or anything else that could be blown into windows and other glazing and break them.
- Close and securely fasten doors and windows, particularly those on the windward side of the house, and especially large doors such as those on garages.
- Park vehicles in a garage, if available; otherwise keep them clear of buildings, trees, walls and fences.
- Close and secure loft trapdoors with bolts, particularly if roof pitch is less than 30°.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012

- If there are storm shutters fitted over the windows then ensure that these are closed and fastened.
- If chimney stacks are tall and in poor condition, move beds away from areas directly below them.

During

Stay indoors as much as possible.

- If you do go out, try not to walk or shelter close to buildings and trees.
- Keep away from the sheltered side of boundary walls and fences — if these structures fail, they will collapse on this side.
- Do not go outside to repair damage while the storm is in progress.
- If possible, enter and leave the building/house through doors in the sheltered side, closing them behind you – be prepared for them being blown open.
- Open internal doors only as needed, and close them behind you.
- Take care when driving on exposed routes such as bridges, or high open roads, delay your journey or find alternative routes if possible.
- Slow down and be aware of side winds, particular care should be taken if you are towing or are a high-sided vehicle such as mini busses.
- Do not drive unless your journey is really necessary.
- Keep occupants of buildings away from large areas of glass if trees or other objects, such as roof tiles, could break the glass.

After

- Be careful not to touch any electrical/telephone cables that have been blown down or are still hanging.
- Do not walk too close to walls, buildings and trees as they could have been weakened.
- Make sure that any vulnerable neighbours or relatives are safe and help them make arrangements for any repairs.
- There may be some serious traffic disruption so check your transport routes home before leaving.

8.0 – Failure of Heating

There is always the chance that radiators will stop functioning correctly and alternative provisions will have to be put in place to ensure that people are kept warm and safe.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 state that “The method of heating used must not result in the escape of fumes, gas, or vapour that is likely to be injurious or offensive to any person.”

It also goes on to state that “Where a reasonably comfortable temperature cannot be achieved throughout a workroom, local heating or cooling (as appropriate) should be provided”. “Where, despite the provision of local heating or cooling, workers are exposed to temperatures which do not give reasonable comfort, suitable protective clothing and rest facilities should be provided.”

In schools specifically, staff should employ different methods to ensure that students are warm, these could include:

- Classes joining together for the day.
- Break and lunchtime being held indoors.
- Certain areas or rooms of the school being closed off, with students being moved into another section.
- Portable heaters being used in classrooms to increase the room temperature.
- If portable heaters are used, use types with no naked flame if at all possible (i.e. oil filled radiators, convection heaters etc. in preference to gas heaters) and ensure they are supervised - to reduce the risk of fire and burns.
- These heaters should not be used to dry coats or any other kind of clothing, as this could also present a fire risk.
- Allow coats to be worn indoors.
- Provide hand gels in toilet areas (where hot water is affected or has run out).
- Consider sending some pupils home and move other classes to unaffected areas if possible.

Note: In some circumstances it may be necessary to close a school. However, this would not normally be necessary unless the normal heating was not available for an extended period and other factors applied – such as staff not being able to travel and so adequate levels of supervision could not be provided.

9.0 - Useful resources

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/guide/weather/severe-weather-advice/stor>
<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning/get-ready-for-winter/travel/road/driving-in-severe-weather#winterhighways-driving-in-ice-and-snow>

Detailed information from the Met Office about extreme weather and driving in different weather conditions.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Cold Weather Guidance – HSG012

<http://www.essexhighways.org/Transport-and-Roads/Roads-and-Pavements/Winter-travel/Track-the-gritting-lorries.aspx>

A map showing the locations of gritting lorries in Essex, particularly useful during icy and snowy weather conditions.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/outdoor.htm>

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/faq.htm>

Legislation and advice regarding temperature at work, helpful if you have any queries or concerns surrounding the temperature of your workplace.

<http://www.sohas.co.uk/publications/publication13.pdf>

A great resource for outdoor workers who are exposed to cold conditions.