



TECH TO TECH

Newsletter

of the College Laboratory Technician Chapter of the PSC/CUNY

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Winter Safety

Introduction

The four environmental conditions that cause cold-related stress are low temperatures, cool high wind, dampness and cold water. Wind chill, a combination of temperature and velocity, is a crucial factor to evaluate when going outside. A dangerous situation of rapid heat loss may arise for an individual exposed to high winds and cold temperatures.

During a winter storm people can be trapped at home, without utilities or other services. Motorists can be marooned in their cars. Walking or driving can be extremely dangerous.

Older adults often create less body heat due to lower metabolism and decreased levels of physical activity. People who are exposed to low temperatures and strong winds tire easily, experience rapid cooling of exposed skin, and become more sensitive to hypothermia.

Risk Factors for Cold-Related Stress

Wearing inadequate or wet clothing.

Taking certain drugs or medications such as alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and medications that inhibit the body's response to the cold or impair judgment.

Having a cold or certain diseases such as diabetes, heart, vascular and thyroid problems may make a person more susceptible to the winter elements.

Being a male.

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Holiday Safety

There is no place like home for the holidays and no place like home for incidents involving fire, falls, electrocution and other types of accidents during the holiday season. Below are some standard guidelines for holiday safety.

Trees

When buying a Christmas tree, make sure the needles have not dried out. Bounce it on the ground several times. If it loses a lot of needles, look for another tree.

When using evergreen boughs, the same precaution should be followed as with trees.

Recut the tree trunk 1"-3" from the bottom so it can absorb water more easily.

Keep the tree outside, in water, until you are ready to set it up. Keep it watered while in use.

Have the tree sprayed with a fire retardant material.

Do not place tree near stairways, in doorways, exits, hallways or any other location where the tree, if standing or fallen, would block an escape route.

Keep fresh pine boughs or trees far away from any heat sources such as portable heaters, fireplaces or candles, as well as electrical equipment.

As soon as the needles begin to fall, dispose of the tree.

When using an artificial tree, make sure it is marked "flame retardant."

Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.

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Being exhausted or immobilized, especially due to injury or entrapment.

Aging— the elderly are more vulnerable.

Winter Hazards— Hypothermia and Frostbite

Frostbite: skin tissue actually freezes, causing ice crystals to form between cells and draws water from them, leading to cellular dehydration— seek medical assistance.

Hypothermia: occurs when the body core temperature drops below normal. It can be generated indoors as well as outdoors. In temperatures as high as 40°F. An individual can become hypothermic if chilled by rain, sweat or submersion in water.

Victims of hypothermia are most often the elderly with inadequate food, clothing or heating. Infants sleeping in cold bedrooms and people who remain outdoors for long periods such as homeless, bikers and hunters are often victims.

Wind Chill— A Crucial Factor When Outside

Keep Warm— Protect Yourself.

Wear at least three layers of clothing:

- 1) an inner layer of cotton or synthetic weave to allow ventilation,
- 2) a middle layer of lightweight wool or synthetic fabric to absorb sweat and retain insulation in a damp environment,
- 3) an outer layer of water repellent, tighter woven material that breaks the wind and allows some ventilation.

Wear mittens instead of gloves.

Wear a hat— a tremendous amount of body heat escapes through the head.

Footwear should be insulated to protect against cold and dampness.

Keep yourself and your clothing dry. Keep a change of clothing available, if possible, in case garments become wet.

Cover your mouth to protect your lungs, avoid taking deep breaths and minimize talking.

Avoid overexertion, such as when shoveling heavy snow or pushing a car. The strain may cause a heart attack.

Walk carefully. Slips and falls occur often on snow and ice.

Plan Safe Winter Travel

Winterize your car— avoid being stranded in cold weather.

Take your cell phone. Call for help if necessary.

Keep a windshield scraper and small broom in your car to remove ice and snow.

Assemble a disaster kit for each car your family uses: shovel, scraper, flashlight, battery powered radio, water, snacks, extra hat and mittens, blanket, road salt and sand, booster cables, emergency flares and fluorescent distress flag, thermos of warm liquid to drink.

Keep car's gas tank full for emergency use and to keep fuel line from freezing.

Plan long trips carefully— listen to radio for latest road conditions and weather reports. Travel during daylight and with at least one more person.

Let someone know your destination, route and expected arrival time.

Home Heating

Use of wood stoves, fireplaces and space heaters can be dangerous.

Do not burn paper in fireplace.

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Lights and Candles

Avoid lighted candles, if possible. Keep them away from flammable areas, and never put them on or near a tree.

Do not display burning candles in windows or near exits.

Keep all candles and matches out of the reach of children.

Any electric lights should be UL listed and in good condition. This is true of extension cords as well.

Avoid extension cords. If a cord is necessary, use heavy gauge cord. Place extension cords in view. Do not hide them under rugs, drapes or furniture.

Do not use outdoor lights inside the house. Do not use indoor lights outside the house. Limit bulb size to a smaller type that does not produce large amounts of heat. Use only decorative lights approved for the specified use you have in mind. Check them before using and replace broken or cracked sockets or bulbs.

Don't overload an electric circuit with appliances.

Avoid keeping the decorative lights on for extended periods of time. Unplug them when you go to bed.

Look for frayed or bare wire, loose connections or damaged plugs. Discard any damaged light sets.

Decorations

Use only nonflammable decorations if possible.

No flammable decorations should be used around doors or hallways, or in exits.

Don't use sprinkler pipes or heads as hangers for decorations.

Odds and Ends

Make sure your smoke detectors have fresh batteries.

Disallow smoking around decorations and trees.

Clean up accumulated gift paper, ribbons and boxes before they become a fire hazard.

After holiday parties, make sure all cigarette butts are completely out before cleaning out ashtrays. Then inspect furniture cushions for dropped cigarette butts. They can smolder for hours before igniting.

**Ezra Seltzer
Randy Smith**

PSC/CUNY, *ALERT*, December, 1999

There's No Place Like Home For Holiday Accidents



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Never leave fire unattended.

Keep dry chemical fire extinguisher near room being heated.

Kerosene heater— provide adequate ventilation.

Don't use heater with damaged electrical cord.

Have working smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors on each level of home.

Keep area around heating unit clear of flammable/combustible items such as furniture, drapes and upholstery.

Cover exposed outside pipes with foam pipe insulation.

Put freeze caps on all outside faucets.

Allow inside pipes to drip to help prevent pipes from bursting.

Some references cited:

OSHA fact sheet 98-55.

NYSUT, *The Retiree Organizer*, Feb. 2004

Weber State University, *Public Safety News*, Winter 2004.

Ezra Seltzer

From the Chair

You may have noticed by now that this entire issue is devoted to your safety and health. We did this because we think that, especially during the Winter/Holiday season, it is important to be aware of the dangers and pitfalls that may be overshadowed by celebrations and fun.

Do not misconstrue this to mean that we are now lax about urging you to be active in union and chapter activities. We ain't— the next issue will be right back on track!

Your participation is still wanted and needed. You are still the ones who will determine the path taken by the CLT chapter and the PSC by your support (or lack thereof).

Go to the "ACT NOW" page of the PSC web site and e-mail politicians. Get involved in the "Contract Now" campaign. Attend rallies, marches and meetings.

Help the CLT Executive Committee and the PSC leadership to secure a good contract for you.

Happy Holidays! Season's Greetings! Be active, healthy and safe.

Shelly Mendlinger



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President Barbara Bowen

Newsletter staff

Managing Editors Shelly Mendlinger
Randy Smith

City Editor Ezra Seltzer

Layout/design Shelly Mendlinger

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Names and Numbers

CLT Executive Committee

Shelly Mendlinger . Chair (718) 951-5721
 Ellen Steinberg Vice Chair, Grievance coun.
 (212) 481-5056
 Randy Smith, ret. ... Secretary, DA, Membership Chair
 Steve Trimboli Cross Campus Officer, Grievance Chair. ...
 (718) 960-8644
 Louis Rivera Officer-at-Large (212) 220-1490
 Keith Rowan Officer-at-Large (718) 982-3278
 Tom Shemanski Officer-at-Large (718) 631-6271
 Robert Suhoke Officer-at-Large (212) 650-6973
 Joy Johnson DA (718) 270-6210
 Robert Wurman, ret. DA, .
 Freelun Maria Chen, ret. Alt DA
 Camille MacIntyre . Alt DA (212) 481-5057
 Ellen Steinberg Alt DA (212) 481-5056
 Marion Saccardi Alt DA (718) 368-5198
 Ezra Seltzer, ret. Communicator (718) 209-0416

CLT Campus Representatives

Campus	CLT Rep.	Phone
Baruch	Alan Pearlman	(646) 312-4492
BMCC	Louis Rivera	(212) 220-1490
BxCC	Lourdes Rosario	(718) 289-5219
Brooklyn	Shelly Mendlinger	(718) 951-5721
City	Derek Quinlan	(212) 650-6060
COSI	Marie Larsen	(718) 982-3967
Grad Center	Barry Carr	(212) 817-2552,7336
Hostos	Marisa Rodrigues	(718) 518-6548
Hunter	Camille McIntyre	(212) 481-5057
John Jay	Nikolay Azar	(212) 237-8155
KCC	Marion Saccardi	(718) 368-5198
LaGuardia	Marge Lesser	(718) 482-5779
Lehman		
Medgar Evers	Joy Johnson	(718) 270-6204
NYCCT	Albert Sherman	(718) 260-5837
Queens	Alan Bartow	(718) 997-4181
Queensboro	Tom Shemanski	(718) 631-6271
York	Joel Gomez	(718) 262-2596

PSC/CUNY

Central Office (212) 354-1252
 Central Office Fax (212) 302-7815
 Credit Union (212) 354-2238
 Welfare Fund (212) 354-5230

E-Info

PSC web page www.psc-cuny.org
 CLT Info-list cunyclt-l@hunter.cuny.edu (to send e-mail)
 To subscribe send e-mail to:
 majordomo@hunter.cuny.edu
 In body of message type the command:
 subscribe cunyclt-l
 CLT Discussion-list psc-clt@groups.yahoo.com (to send e-mail)
 To subscribe send e-mail to: Ellen Steinberg at
 esteinbe@hunter.cuny.edu
 Ask to be subscribed to psc-clt.