

Winter is Coming

Every October in Saskatchewan, we start to think about (dread) the incoming cold weather. If you're reading or listening to this, chances are it's already sweater weather.

Layering sweaters and shirts are a sure way to stay warm, but what happens when your body loses the ability to cool down? We take the layers off.



Labour Intensive Work

If we are excessively warm, we sweat more. Construction is very labour-intensive. When we move, we burn calories and generate heat. To combat this, our bodies sweat in an attempt to cool us down. Our body intends for the water in our sweat to evaporate and cool the surface of our skin.

Our bodies can sweat a lot. Some people can sweat as much as 10 liters in a day. The inability of this amount of sweat to evaporate can lead to overheating... Yes, even during the winter. This can be dangerous when you stop moving. Sweat can stay close to the skin and can freeze.

What Keeps You Warm

In cold weather, while wearing warm clothing, there is a pocket of air surrounding your body that keeps you warm. Layering clothing should help keep that air insulated.

It is important that the clothing chosen is not overly cumbersome and is not overly tight. Too much and you can overheat. Too little and you can lose body temperature. Both situations are avoidable and require targeted layering to ensure a comfortable body temperature is maintained.

Layering

In construction, you are likely to experience the cold. You can be in and out of heated areas, or strictly in the elements.

Layers can be removed and added to remain comfortable in all situations. It is important to think about your working conditions and the job you're doing. There is a basic 3-layer principle that outlines what to wear.

1. The Base Layer

- This layer should be a sweat-wicking type of material. It should transport sweat away from the skin to keep you dry.

2. The Mid Layer

- This layer should have insulating properties that keep your body heat trapped in that pocket of air close to the body.

3. The Outer Layer

- This outer layer should protect you from the elements. That can be the wind, cold temperatures, or rain and snow.

These layers can vary based on the temperatures experienced, and the work being conducted. The thickest possible clothing layers might not always be a great idea.

Layer Examples

1. **The Base Layer** - Avoid materials that soak up sweat. Wool and synthetic materials are good at moving sweat away from the body.
2. **The Mid Layer** - Sweaters, and soft shells are good options. They are warm and insulating but do not protect against the elements such as wind or rain.
3. **The Outer Layer** - Soft-shelled jackets, hard-shelled jackets, insulated jackets (i.e. down filled)

These are examples. You must dress according to the weather and level of physical activity. You must be prepared to add, remove or change the layer material depending on the fluctuating Saskatchewan weather.

Sources:

- <https://www.wiseworksafe.com/blog/view/the-garment-layering-system-3-layer>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK236237/#:~:text=Sweat%20rate%20is%20proportional%20to,to%20300%20ml%20per%20hour>

Tool Box Talk

When accidents and incidents happen on the jobsite, we are always quick to point the finger at lack of training, not following practices or procedures, or even improper supervision. The idea that the hazards and dangers associated with the job were not properly communicated to all of the workers is often missed.

Tool Box Talks can go by many names, and although formats may vary, these meetings all serve one purpose: to inform employees and contract workers. Tool Box Talks are short, informal, meetings between management and the workers on a jobsite. The goal of these meetings is to reinforce current safe job procedures, inform workers of new and/or relevant procedures, review recent safety violations/incidents, and ensure workers are up-to-date on the information required to complete their work safely.

Always use a Tool Box Talk form to record the meeting topic, date, who was in attendance, and any follow-up actions to be taken. Not only do these forms help with consistency of record keeping, but they also ensure that nothing is missed. At the end of the meeting have management sign off on the form.

One of the most important aspects of a Tool Box Talk is giving workers an opportunity to voice their concerns and ask questions. All employees have a right to participate in health and safety as it relates to their work and it is the supervisor or manager's responsibility to create an environment for them to do so. Once the meeting is over, and the form is filled out, it should be filed with other documented Tool Box Talks.

Remember that Tool Box Talks are short and informal, they are not meant to be intimidating. Use the opportunity to have fun and stay on top of what is necessary to keep safety culture a strong part of the business.

For a full listing of Tool Box Talk topics, visit: www.scsaonline.ca/resources/tool-box-talks

For a copy of the Tool Box Talk form, visit: www.scsaonline.ca/pdf/Tool_Box_Meeting.pdf

About the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association

The Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association (SCSA) is a non-profit organization funded by the construction industry to provide quality, affordable safety training, programs and advice. The SCSA serves 14,000 member companies that are registered with the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) and employ workers in building construction. Established in 1995, the SCSA remains committed to injury prevention. By aiming to reduce the human and financial losses associated with injuries, the SCSA supports a safe, healthy and profitable industry.

The vision of the SCSA is to create the Safest Construction Environment in Canada through its mission of Constructing Safety Leadership.