

Tool Box Talk

Winter Clothing for Construction

Winter is Coming

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

Wearing layers of sweaters and shirts is 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

The warmer we are, the more we sweat. 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, and some people can sweat as much as 10 litres in a day. The inability of this amount of sweat to evaporate can lead to overheating, even during the winter. This can be dangerous when you stop moving, as 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 you choose is neither overly awkward nor 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 working in the cold. You can be moving in and out of heated areas or strictly working in the elements year-round.

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. Use a basic 3-layer principle that outlines what to wear.

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

- **The Base Layer:** Avoid materials that soak up sweat. Wool and synthetic materials are good at moving sweat away from the body.
- **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.
- **The Outer Layer:** Soft-shelled jackets, hard-shelled jackets, insulated jackets (e.g. down-filled)

Dress appropriately for both the weather and your level of physical activity. Be ready to modify layers as needed to stay comfortable in Saskatchewan's constantly changing conditions.