

# Weather Conditions

May 2019

Weather not only influences the pace of construction work but it also affects the level of risks construction workers are exposed to. For example, extremely hot summer temperatures have been known to cause heat exhaustion and heat stroke among workers that the OSHA has already established guidelines on how to safeguard workers from these risks. On the other hand, windy or wet weather increases the likelihood of workers or objects falling from elevated areas, which could lead to serious to fatal injuries.

Weather is a paramount concern in the construction business because workers generally perform their tasks outdoors, which means getting exposed to both good and bad weather conditions. Depending on the geographic location of the construction site, the season of the year, and the local weather patterns, construction companies should always align their project schedules with the weather. The following are some of the commonest weather hazards construction workers are exposed to:

1. extreme heat - may cause heat exhaustion, heat stroke, heat cramps, and heat rashes
2. extreme cold - may cause hypothermia and frostbite; may also reduce workers' grip on equipment and tools
3. rains & icy weather - may cause surfaces to be slippery, which can then result to personal injuries and damaged properties; may cause electrical cables to become "live"; may cause sewage systems to overflow;
4. lightning - may cause electric shocks and electrocution
5. UV radiation - may cause skin diseases and cancer
6. Strong winds - may cause workers and objects in elevated platforms to fall; may cause heavy equipment such as cranes to lose balance and topple over

The Occupational Safety and Health Act requires employers to provide safety training and personal protective equipment (PPE) to their workers that are adequate in addressing the environmental hazards they are exposed to. PPE includes hardhats, protective goggles, gloves, waterproof clothing, and other protective gear.

In order to reduce the risk of workers experiencing different weather-related health & safety hazards, construction companies are advised to perform the following:

1. Conduct worker trainings on weather-related hazards
2. Encourage the use of the appropriate personal protective equipment in different extreme weather scenarios
3. Build rest sheds (cool for extreme heat, and warm for chilly winters) wherein workers can take frequent breaks
4. Schedule work depending on the season. That is, workers should be working at the coolest part of the day in very hot weather. Conversely, work should be at peak during warm hours in cold weather.

Meanwhile, workers should always look after themselves and adhere to safety guidelines for work processes under adverse weather conditions. Here are some practical safety tips:

1. Wear the appropriate personal protective equipment. For example, protective boots that have anti-slip soles is critical when working in slippery surfaces. Protective goggles with anti UV lenses is great for long periods of outdoor work.
2. Work in pairs whenever possible.
3. Take frequent breaks in adverse weather to avoid over exposure.
4. Place warning signs throughout the construction site for possible hazards such as slippery floors, potholes, electrical wiring and others.

