

SAFETY MEMO

October 4, 2021 – Working in a Refrigerated Environment



Did you know?

Background Context

In many industries, products require a refrigerated environment with temperatures of 4°C or lower. Refrigeration is commonly used during different stages of production, receipt of raw materials, storage of the finished product before shipment, transport, or all these situations simultaneously.

Since the merchandise must be kept cold, workers called upon to supervise or participate in production, or to take care of handling and delivery, are also exposed to cold temperatures.

This can be dangerous if:

- The exposure is prolonged,
- Workers do not have the appropriate personal protective equipment, or
- They have little or no knowledge of the risks associated with their work environment.

Potential Risks

The physical risks associated with working in a refrigerated environment are:

- If fingers are not well protected, workers risk losing some of their fine motor skills, which would prevent them from performing more delicate operations.
- If the extremities of the body are poorly protected (for example the fingers, toes, or ears), not only does fine motor loss happen, but frostbite could also develop.
- If there is a liquid spilled on the floor, the puddle can quickly freeze to ice. Ice is a hazard which can lead to slips and/or falls.
- Objects falling from heights in a freezer have the potential to fall with greater force because they may be frozen.

These risks are just as relevant to workers present in the refrigerated environment as if they are directly handling the products.

Managing Risk

Working in refrigerated environments presents unique risk management strategies. Before the start of work, potential hazards/risks must be identified, and management approaches put in place to ensure workers can safely perform work.

These approaches are recommended:

- Work Procedures:
 - Rotate out of the refrigerated environment to avoid long exposure to cold.
 - Pay close attention to loss of fine motor skills, especially in fingers, and either better protect the extremities or leave the refrigerated environment to warm up.



- Personal Protective Equipment:
 - Cold weather clothing – dress appropriately for the temperature. This includes proper layering of clothing under coats, coats/jackets, toques/face coverings and gloves/mitts/socks. Pay attention to exposed skin and avoid frostbite.
 - Footwear – wearing appropriate shoes designed to reduce slipping and to counter the cold
 - Head Protection – it is recommended to always wear head protection

Summary

Working in refrigerated environments requires hazard/risk identification and risk management. Being prepared will ensure work can be done safely and comfortable, despite the low temperature!

