

Winter tips for Midwestern dairy workers

Maristela Rovai¹ and Luciana Bignardi da Costa²

¹Dairy and Food Science Department, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD

²Ohio State University Extension | Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

Cold and snowy winters are a challenge for dairy workers, especially for those immigrants coming from warmer climates where the temperatures do not fall to single digits. Hypothermia caused by cold temperatures, winds, presence of road ice, snow, sleet, and freezing rain can all be considered potential hazards for dairy workers. Informing the dairy workers of simple cold weather survival tips would be beneficial in improving their quality of life, both at home and the workplace.

Accidents are frequent during slippery conditions and adapting to these circumstances will reduce everyone's risk of getting into an unfortunate situation.

Basic tips such as taking the time to do basic vehicle maintenance, have an emergency supply kit or instructions on how to drive safe in snowy days could help avoid life risking situations. We must remember that dairy workers are essential to the farms and the livestock needs them 24/7.

Dairy workers jobs require long work shifts. Thus, if you own a car make sure to inflate your car's tires, your gas tank is filled, lubricate mechanical parts, and have an emergency kit on hand, so you can get home or to work safe and sound.

1. Preparing the house or trailer

After a long day at work, you probably want to relax, feel warm and let go of the pressures of the day. Ensuring your house is adequately heated is important. There are a few simple ways to reduce the overall heat loss, make sure all windows are closed, replace damaged door seals, use carpet, and curtains.

Prior to winter season, make sure to:	I have it:
• Cover the windows with plastic to avoid cold air drafts	
• Have salt or cat litter to keep ice off walkways	
• Drain and/or cover all outside piping	
• Have a shovel handy	
• Check the furnace filters	
Trailer homes	I did it:
• Heat tape to be used on water / sewer pipes	
• Proper insulate around the skirting	
During winter, make sure to:	I did it:
• Watch for excessive snow on roof and remove it	
• Keep ice off walkways to avoid slippery spots	

2. Winter wardrobe accessories

When choosing what to wear, carefully select clothing that will not restrict movement (too tight can restrict movement and reduces circulation). Wearing appropriate clothing, or layers of loose clothing can provide better insulation for your body. Protect your face, extremities and feet – good waterproof and insulated boots with wool or wool-cotton blend socks are very helpful. Wearing a hat reduces the heat that dissipates from your head keeping your body warmer. Having extra socks, gloves, hats, jacket, blankets, and a change of clothes could be necessary at work or in vehicle during the harsh winters.

Prior to winter season, check if you have for working:	I have it:
• Lined jackets	
• Lined overalls and lined boots	
• Stocking caps / hats and lined gloves	
• Long thermal underwear	
• Wicking wool socks	
• Scarf	

3. Safe Driving

Car safety and driving carefully should be our number one priority during any season of the year; however, during winter we must be even more cautious behind the wheel.

The three P's of Safe Winter Driving as described by OSHA are: "PREPARE for the trip; PROTECT yourself; and PREVENT crashes on the road". For that, it is important the car maintenance is up to date and the car is stocked with a few lifesaving items before the start of the winter season. The following table will help you be organized during winter:

Prior to winter season, check all vehicles for:	I did it:
• Tire tread depth and properly inflated	
• Windshield wipers	
• Oil change	
• Battery life	
• Antifreeze	
• Washer antifreeze windshield fluid added in the washer reservoir	
• Clean car windows	
Keep always in the car:	I have it:
• Salt, sandbags or cat litter for extra weight and traction if needed	
• Cellphone charger and car adaptor	
• Battery jump pack for cold weather	
• Chain to secure a vehicle to be towed	

• Ice scraper	
• Shovel	
• Emergency Bag with:	
○ Non-freezing foods: chocolate, cereal bar, nuts, or peanuts	
○ Water bottles for hydration	
○ Extra winter clothes: coat, scarf, hats, and gloves	
○ Blanket	
○ Flashlight, candles and lighter	
○ Brightly colored cloth to use as a flag	
○ Antifreeze	
During the winter season, make sure to:	
• Plug in diesel vehicle if needed	
• Use #1 diesel or add diesel treatment in the fuel	
• Pump your breaks slowly when on ice	
• Give more distance in-between vehicles	
• Keep fuel tank at least half full	
• Buckle up	
• Awareness of wildlife eyes reflection	
• Drive slowly and do not make sudden corrections	
• Turn off your cruise control	
• Turn on lights	
• Dial 511 or check online for road conditions	

4. Important body signs associated with Winter

The temperature drops, wind starts blowing and the snow piles up, suddenly everyone starts taking their winter clothing out of the wardrobe. We cannot control the weather, but we can take control of how we will be protected during the winter.

Hypothermia (abnormally low body temperature) and frostbite are both cold-related emergencies and considered as dangerous conditions that can happen when we are exposed to extremely cold temperatures. It is important to be aware that these conditions may quickly become life or limb threatening. Preventing cold-related emergencies includes knowledge and action.

Be sure to check the outside temperature and limit your time outdoors if it is very cold, wet, or windy. If you experience any of the following cold-related emergencies remove wet clothing, wrap the body in blankets, drink warm beverages, if possible, take a warm bath to help raise body temperature and seek for medical help immediately.

A) Hypothermia

It occurs when our body loses heat faster than it can be produced, causing a drop in the body's core temperature (below 35.0 °C or 95.0 °F in humans). We should be aware of the following signs:

- Fast and shallow breathing / trouble breathing

- Going from shivering to not shivering
- Hunger, fatigue and confusion
- Lack of coordination
- Increased heart rate
- Weak pulse
- Slurred speech / mumbling
- Dizziness and nausea

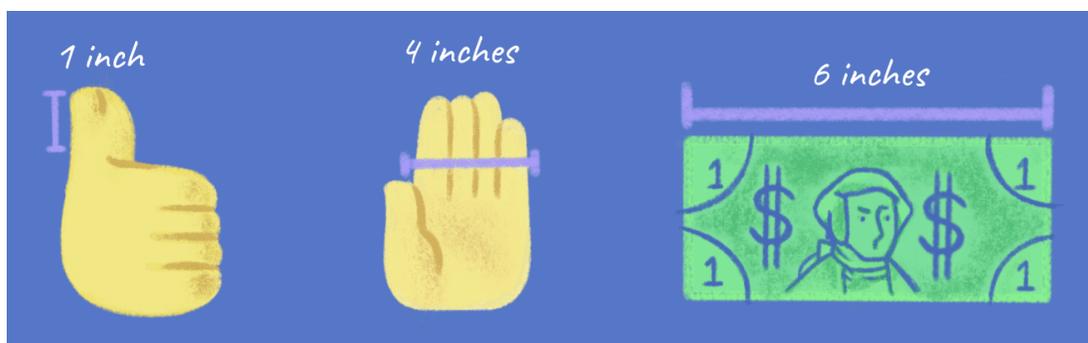
B) Frostbite

The exposure to extremely cold temperatures may lead to a reduced blood flow to the extremities (hands, fingers, toes, feet) causing frostbite. We should be aware of the following signs:

- Cold skin, prickling feeling and numbness
- Red, white, bluish-white or grayish-yellow skin
- Hard or waxy-looking skin
- Clumsiness due to joint and muscle stiffness
- Blistering after rewarming when severe (expect exposed skin to peel off)
- If the skin turns black seek medical attention
- It can cause the tissue to die which is called gangrene

5. Important Winter tips:

- 1) **DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL** to keep you warm. For dairy farm employees, alcohol may seem like the perfect cold-weather beverage that creates a sensation of warmth and comfort. Alcohol decreases core body temperature regardless of the temperature outside and will increase hypothermia risk. In this way, the feelings of warmth are momentary, and soon the desire for another alcoholic beverage.
- 2) **CHECK WEATHER REPORTS** daily and **GET WEATHER UPDATES** on your phone. Roads can quickly become slick and ice covered while you are getting ready to leave the house or the work.
 - US National Weather Service
<https://www.weather.gov/> and customize your city and region
 - State's Highway Patrol for road updates
South Dakota: <https://dps.sd.gov/safety-enforcement/highway-patrol>
- 3) **ON A DAY THAT IT SNOWS**, PLAN ON LEAVING EARLIER to get to work
- 4) **DO NOT LEAVE YOUR VEHICLE** If you get stuck, it provides temporary shelter
- 5) **DRINK ENOUGH WATER** to stay hydrated
- 6) **KEEP CELLPHONES CHARGED**
- 7) **SNOW** measurements using you finger. Remember 1 inch = 2.54 cm



Getting to our jobs during a snow or ice storm can be stressful. Drive carefully, leave earlier and when possible, do carpooling with your colleagues.

Let's go smart and make the most of winter, working comfortably and getting home safe and sound.

If you need a specific protocol or guidance for sharing with your employees and colleagues, let us know. We will be glad to help. You may contact us at:

Maristela Rovai: maristela.rovai@sdstate.edu

Luciana da Costa: da-costa.2@osu.edu