



Hypothermia on a Fall Afternoon

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BACKGROUND

On a fall afternoon, a trucker pulled onto a landing to load logs from a one-person logging operation. Knowing that he was often the only person a solo logger would see during the day, the trucker always made it a habit to connect with the logger – either personally or via radio – when he loaded logs.

This incident occurred on a typical Northeastern fall afternoon – there was a breeze, and it had rained earlier in the day, though the rain had stopped, and temperatures were around 60 degrees.

UNSAFE ACT OR CONDITION

The trucker did not see the logger but could contact him via cell phone. While the logger said he was doing great and just in the woods felling trees, the trucker noticed slurred speech and mumbling. Sensing something was wrong, he walked into the woods to locate the logger. Upon finding him, he observed that the logger had been soaked during the recent rainstorm. The logger exhibited a lack of coordination, stumbling, and slurred speech.

OBSERVATION & TREATMENT

The trucker suspected the logger was hypothermic, where a person's body cannot generate enough heat to keep them warm. Even though it was a relatively warm day, the fact that the logger was wearing soaked clothing and there was a breeze combined to create a dangerous situation.

The trucker convinced the logger to come to the landing, using the ruse that he thought some of the wood laid out wasn't right for the mill it was headed to. Once at the landing, the trucker provided the logger with food, hot coffee, and a hat, and convinced the logger to change his wet clothing into other clothing in the logger's truck. The trucker then loaded the wood while continuing to speak with and observe the logger.

Once the logger was warmed up, he explained what he had seen and how he had been treated, and encouraged the logger to go home for the remainder of the afternoon.

SYMPTOMS HYPOTHERMIA

Hyperthermia is often thought of as a cold-weather risk but can occur any time of year under the right conditions (as demonstrated above). Symptoms include:

- Shivering
- Slurred speech or mumbling
- Weak pulse
- Clumsiness or lack of coordination
- Drowsiness or deficient energy
- Confusion or memory loss
- Loss of consciousness

Someone with hypothermia usually isn't aware of their condition because the symptoms often begin gradually. Also, the confused thinking associated with hypothermia prevents self-awareness and often requires intervention by other people.



This Safety Alert analyzes an injury in accordance with the chain of events represented by the five dominoes above. Pioneer industry safety experts H.W. Heinrich and Alfred Lateiner developed this accident analysis system to provide a graphic sense of how injuries can be avoided. Their methodology has been accepted by safety professionals worldwide.

Safety Meeting Report

Topic(s) Discussed:

Comments / Recommendations:

Date:

Company:

Names of Employees Attending:

Meeting Conducted by:

Please follow equipment manufacturers' recommendations for safe operation and maintenance procedures.

signature



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TREATMENT FOR HYPOTHERMIA

The most important thing is gradually warming the individual and getting them into an environment that will not contribute to further hypothermia

- Move the person out of the cold. Move the person to a warm, dry location if possible. If you're unable to move the person out of the cold, shield them from the cold and wind as much as possible.
- Remove wet clothing. If the person is wearing wet clothing, remove it. Cut away clothing if necessary to avoid excessive movement.
- Cover the person with blankets. Use layers of dry blankets or coats to warm the person. Cover the person's head, leaving only the face exposed.
- Provide warm beverages. If the affected person is alert and able to swallow, provide a warm, sweet, nonalcoholic, non-caffeinated beverage to help warm the body.



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