

Beware Of Hypothermia As Temperatures Fall

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.)— Farmers, boaters and fishermen, construction workers and others who work and play outside should be aware of the dangers of hypothermia as winter sets in, says a safety expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Hypothermia occurs when a person's body loses heat faster than it can replace it, causing the internal body temperature to drop dangerously low," says Sam Steel, project associate in agricultural and biological engineering and director of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Safety Council. "Most people think temperatures below freezing cause hypothermia, but it can happen in temperatures as mild as 35 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

"The average internal body temperature for most adults is 98.6 degrees. If that drops to 90 degrees, the person can become unconscious and vital organs such as the heart and the brain may be seriously damaged."

Hypothermia symptoms include slurred speech, stumbling, confused thinking, shivering, weakness, fatigue, weak pulse and shallow breathing. As the condition worsens, the victim's muscles may become rigid and the heart-beat irregular. Death can result from heart or respiratory failure.

"If someone shows signs of hypothermia, seek medical attention immediately," Steel says. "Victims usually are not aware that they are cold and may even insist that they are comfortable," Steel says.

Hypothermia victims generally are unprepared for changing weather, and are usually stranded motorists, hikers and those who work and play outdoors. Hypothermia also can occur in the home. The elderly, small infants and people who are ill are at risk even in seemingly mild indoor climates.

Boaters and fishermen who fall into water are at particular risk, because water cools a person 25 to 30 times faster than exposure to air of the same temperature. "Per-

sons who fall into cold water must concentrate on quickly getting out and getting warm," Steel says.

What can people do to minimize their risk of hypothermia?

"Dressing appropriately for the weather is crucial for anyone working or playing outside," Steel says. "Well-insulated gloves, footwear and hats will prevent excessive heat loss from the head and extremities."

If you will be working alone, always let someone know where you will be. "Tragically, many

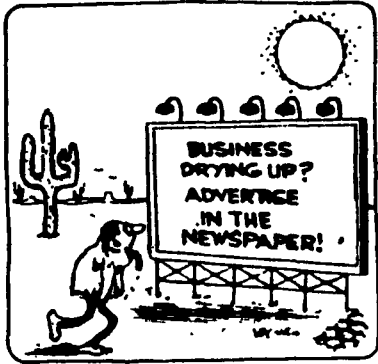
people suffer frostbite, frozen body tissue and even death when working alone in desolate areas," Steel says. "Tell someone where you're going, and be sure to eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest before starting exhausting jobs during winter weather."

It's also a good idea to stock family automobiles and farm and recreational vehicles with extra blankets, gloves and warm clothing in case a breakdown happens during winter. "It may mean the difference between life and

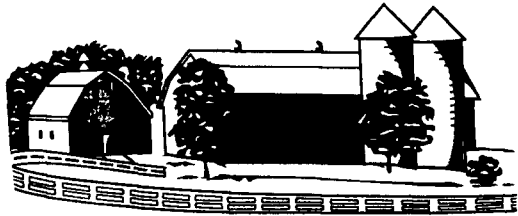
death for you or a loved one," Steel says.

For more information about hypothermia and other safety issues, contact the Pennsylvania Agricultural Safety Council at (814) 863-7710.

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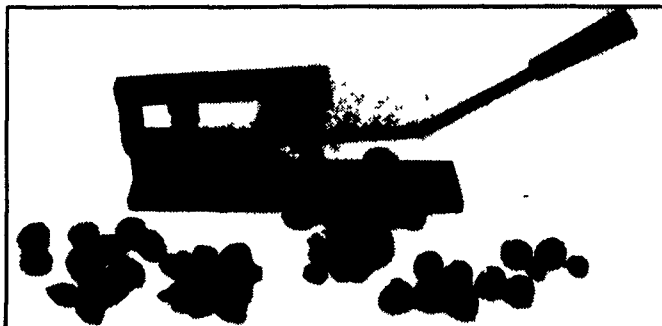
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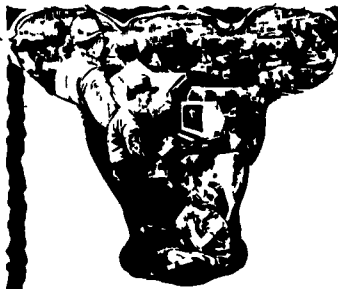


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