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With Fall now firmly upon us, it gives me great pleasure to continue the Labor Division newsletters. Please feel free to share this far and wide.

In Solidarity

Paul Chaney, Labor Division Chairperson

With no pun intended, work in hot environments is a “hot button” item and is a high priority concern for workers, safety and health organizations, S&H professionals, S&H activists and employers. Pushing this item to the forefront is in no small part as a result of climate change. The world is warmer and is continuing to warm, but not only warmer, the weather is more intense as a result. The warmer temperatures account for an increased danger to anyone working in hot environments and with increased intensity in storms, tornados, hurricanes, etc. the danger is also increased. Add to this such things as wildfires that put workers and communities at greater risk.

Okay, that is much of what we already know and have been discussing without pause for months and years. Climate intensity is not just driving hotter environments and heat related stress issues for workers, but climate intensity can and does strengthen winter storms resulting in colder extremes, larger snowfalls, more ice storms and all those things that make winter not only tougher to get through, but more dangerous. In short, the changes to the climate ensure that working in winter is a safety and health challenge also.

What considerations must we consider in the context of work in cold environments? Everything from frostbite to hyperthermia must be considered. The dangers of slips and falls on slippery surfaces have the potential to result in injuries from fractures to much worse if a head injury occurs. Statistics show an ever increasing number of motor vehicle incidents and accidents and severe cold weather will exacerbate this.

Approaching work in any temperature extreme requires a programmatic approach. Such an approach embraces all temperature and adverse weather concerns and ensures that the hierarchy of controls is a fundamental building block of the programmatic approach. In the hierarchy of controls, the most effective control is at the source of the hazard while the least effective is control at the worker. As people skilled in S&H we all know that the use of PPE at the worker will often be required, but PPE at the worker must not be the only consideration.

Controlling extreme weather at the source is unlikely to be a successful strategy, but controls along the path will greatly enhance the successful use of PPE. Along the path for work in hot environments will, for example, be the setting of time limits for exposure and this will work equally as

well for work cold environments. Additional along the path controls for cold weather situations will be early and regular snow clearing of walkways and any area where pedestrians will traverse. Similarly, along the path will include the preventative maintenance of work vehicles such that all work vehicles are prepared for winter. This will include items such as snow tires, new windshield wipers, full windshield washer reservoirs, emergency kits in the vehicles and more.

Although desired the least, PPE will be required for work in cold environments. This will be clothing from boots to gloves to hats and everything in between such that clothing is adequate and approved for the most extreme of the temperatures likely to be exposed to.

One last consideration in any calculation of S&H is the need to ensure that there is the necessary regulatory clout to make employers do that which is necessary to protect all workers. Too often, the workers overrepresented in precarious work are also the most underserved and regulatory support is a necessary piece of the approach to drive the programmatic approach that protects the largest number of workers from the ever increasing dangers of climate change driven adverse weather work environments.