

## *Safety Guru - Fall 2016*

Wow! The year has just flown by. Here we are looking at buttoning up projects and getting ready for cold weather (again). So, as per usual, I will remind you all to make sure you look at equipment and facilities to ensure they will all be prepared for the cold and freezing temperatures. Make sure you have your plans to drain, insulate or otherwise protect things (including people) from the inclement weather we certainly will be experiencing.

Slips, trips and falls seem to be on everyone's minds in the utility business. Winter only makes it more likely to occur with added moisture turning to ice and heavy boots and clothing making it tougher to get around. Winter boots should be chosen to provide warmth and PROTECTION. If you need steel toed boots in the summer – they are also called for in the winter. External toe protection can be substituted – but generally provide even great difficulty getting around. So make sure you are getting the toe and foot protection along with good insulation qualities. You will be much more comfortable and protected.

Vision and hearing are also a challenge in the winter. Bright sunlight off snow can be a real problem and often create problems while driving and sometimes even walking when you come out of a dark liftstation or building. Snow, sleet and icy roads all provide ample opportunities for your vehicles to slip and slide – so don't forget to get tires checked and your winter gear in the trucks as well.

WWTP's also have issues with exhausts from frozen loovers and vents – so make sure all are free and clear to keep your heating and ventilation system in top shape.

Speaking of ventilation- I may have mentioned the topic of Silica in the past – but now that OSHA has posted the “official” new rules – any utilities (or employees) working in dusty conditions will need to review their situations. The standards went into effect and employers need to assess their exposure and practices to protect and/or reduce dust on their jobsites. Since a lot of smaller cities don't have extensive resources to look into these types of rules – here's an easy one: If it is dusty – and you can see the dust – chances are the silica rule will come into play. Silica exposure can lead to all sorts of nasty lung conditions that may even appear worse than lung cancer – so this is serious stuff! Silicosis is the condition that is often the result and it is caused by damage done by the crystalline silica getting into the lungs and causing damage. The silica cannot escape the lung and causes damage to the lung that is irreparable. Simple things like using a dust mask or just staying away from dusty conditions will help. But, if you have to cut concrete or deal with extreme dust – get fitted for a good dust and particle mask, train in its use and of course, get the appropriate medical exam that assures that you are able to use this type of respiratory equipment. Other practices – like using water mists to remove the dust from the air can work – but if you are cutting concrete in January for a water or sewer main break – the mist will turn to ice causing other problems (and that's provided you would have a source of the water for the mist in sub-zero conditions). Check out the [osha.gov](http://osha.gov) website and search “silica” for more information.



## ***Safety Guru Continued***

Speaking of OSHA rules – the construction standard for confined space was recently finalized. I have clipped a review of the rule comparison from the OSHA site:

There are 5 key differences from the construction rule, and several areas where OSHA has clarified existing requirements. The five new requirements include:

- i. More detailed provisions requiring coordinated activities when there are multiple employers at the worksite. This will ensure hazards are not introduced into a confined space by workers performing tasks outside the space. An example would be a generator running near the entrance of a confined space causing a buildup of carbon monoxide within the space.
- ii. Requiring a competent person to evaluate the work site and identify confined spaces, including permit spaces.
- iii. Requiring continuous atmospheric monitoring whenever possible.
- iv. Requiring continuous monitoring of engulfment hazards. For example, when workers are performing work in a storm sewer, a storm upstream from the workers could cause flash flooding. An electronic sensor or observer posted upstream from the work site could alert workers in the space at the first sign of the hazard, giving the workers time to evacuate the space safely.
- v. Allowing for the suspension of a permit, instead of cancellation, in the event of changes from the entry conditions list on the permit or an unexpected event requiring evacuation of the space. The space must be returned to the entry conditions listed on the permit before re-entry.

In addition, OSHA has added provisions to the new rule that clarifies existing requirements in the General Industry standard. These include:

- i. Requiring that employers who direct workers to enter a space without using a complete permit system prevent workers' exposure to physical hazards through elimination of the hazard or isolation methods such as lockout/tag-out.
- ii. Requiring that employers who are relying on local emergency services for emergency services arrange for responders to give the employer advance notice if they will be unable to respond for a period of time (because they are responding to another emergency, attending department-wide training, etc.).
- iii. Requiring employers to provide training in a language and vocabulary that the worker understands.

Finally, several terms have been added to the definitions for the construction rule, such as “entry employer” to describe the employer who directs workers to enter a space, and “entry rescue”, added to clarify the differences in the types of rescue employers can use.

Keep those questions and comments coming. Keep safety at the top of the list – on and off the job!

Safety Guru

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