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RESOURCES:

- [Beating Holiday Stress - WebMD](#)
- [Manage Stress - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Risk Simplified - Managing Stress in the Workplace](#)

Mitigating Holiday Stress

By Eric Lucero

The holiday season presents a range of demands including shopping, cooking, attending events, and entertaining to name just a few. As we hurry to finish everything in time, these demands can take an emotional toll. If not managed, holiday stress can overflow into other areas of our life, including work. Follow these tips to mitigate holiday induced stress this year.

Start with gratitude. Many studies indicate how the feeling of gratitude can offset negative emotions. Throughout the season, recall what you are grateful for, the people you love and cherish, and the opportunities you have been afforded.



Set a budget. Overspending in December can create feelings of regret and stress come January. Avoid starting the New Year with credit card debt by setting a budget and sticking to it.

Share tasks. Do not try to be the perfect host. Ask others for help, so you can enjoy social time with friends and family. Guests can contribute their favorite dish or help to clean up afterwards.

Make a list. Worried that you will forget to do something this holiday season? Declutter your mind by creating a list of tasks that need to be accomplished before the big party.

It's okay to say no. There can be an exorbitant number

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of events during the holidays, and it is okay to selectively choose your holiday outings. Saying “no” will prevent you from overcommitting to events that backlog your to-do-list or cause you to scurry from one event to the next. Think quality, not quantity.

Exercise, sleep and nutrition. Help your body fight stress with daily exercise and adequate rest. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet while drinking plenty of water has been shown to reduce the hormone responsible for stress.

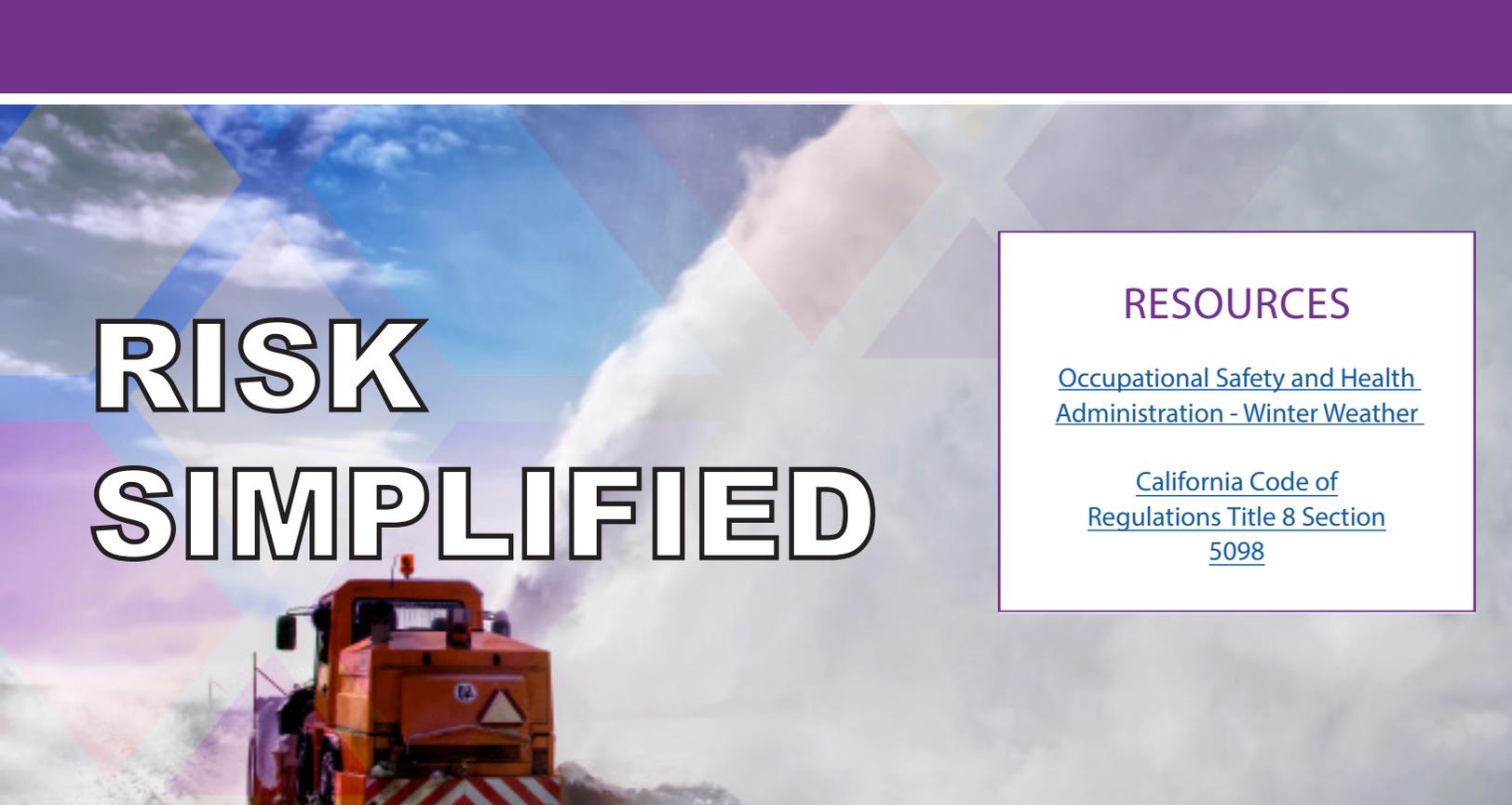
Find support. The holiday season can stir emotions that may be difficult to handle on your own. A counselor, physician, or clergyman can provide professional advice to help. Most employers also

offer Employee Assistance Plans (EAPs) which offer free counseling services to employees and immediate family members. Ask your human resources professional for additional information.

Conclusion

On the whole, the holiday season is short and there are many techniques to mitigate holiday induced stress. Enjoy a stress-free holiday season from your friends at PRISM and GSRMA.

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RESOURCES

[Occupational Safety and Health Administration - Winter Weather](#)

[California Code of Regulations Title 8 Section 5098](#)

Snow Removal Equipment

by Scarlett Sadler

Many agencies are responsible for clearing snow from their property, and while this might be a task that is done with a shovel, it is likely most agencies will be using some sort of powered equipment like an electric snow blower, various stage snow blower, or tractor with a snow blower attachment. Regardless of what type of snow removal equipment is being used, all equipment requires basic maintenance along with being aware of the basic safety recommendations when operating.

Before setting out to utilize snow removal equipment, we suggest being familiar with the following basic maintenance, operations, and safety recommendations:

Equipment Maintenance:

- Operators should familiarize themselves with the machinery's owner's manual and become familiar with all the parts, uses, and recommended maintenance.
- All equipment should be inspected prior to use to ensure the machinery is in good working order to include:
 - Check the fluids, change the oil, and replace or change the fuel. Ideally, fresh fuel should be used at the start of the season and removed when not in use.
 - Inspect belts, hoses, shave plates, paddles, tires, scraper plates, skid shoes, shear pins, cables, auger, batteries, and any other parts on your equipment model. If something is worn or damaged, do not operate the equipment until it is repaired.
- If applicable, always thoroughly clean the chute, impeller, and auger to prevent snow from freezing and damaging equipment before storing.

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Equipment Operation:

- Ensure the path traveled with snow removal equipment is clear of any debris to prevent running over objects that could damage the equipment, injure the operator or nearby persons, or even damage the surrounding property.
- Adjust runners or skid shoes to ensure the scraper blade is at the appropriate height for the surface being cleared.
- Snow removal should occur frequently to prevent snow accumulation. The longer the snow accumulates, the harder the snow removal process will be, especially if the snow melts and refreezes or is walked on or driven on.
- If applicable, install chains prior to starting snow removal.
- Only operate the equipment in conditions of good visibility and ample light. Falling snow, fog, and similar conditions can impair vision.
- Use caution when clearing paths near slopes or hills and changing directions. Keep movements slow and gradual.
- Avoid directing discharge towards persons or property.
- Never leave any running equipment unattended. Always turn off the engine and remove the key if applicable.
- Do not operate equipment on uneven or rough terrain. Exercise extra caution near drop-offs, ditches, or embankments, as units may overturn if a wheel is over the edge.
- Do not overload the equipment capacity by attempting to clear snow too rapidly.
- Agencies should consider conducting snow removal activities during non-business hours or scheduled breaks to ensure safe walking surfaces for employees and the public.
- Never clear a clog when the equipment is on. Ensure that all moving parts have come to a complete stop before attempting to clear any clogs or debris.
 - Avoid using hands to remove materials, even after turning off the engine. Fingers have been amputated when the blade unexpectedly rotated. Instead, use a small shovel, tool, or stick for safe material removal.



Operator Safety:

- An operator should wear protective eyewear, and if the noise level of the equipment is exactly or more than 85 decibels, hearing protection should also be used.
- Agencies should consider implementing policies that address the use of medication, drugs, and

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alcohol while operating snow removal equipment to prevent employee injuries resulting from impairment.

- Equipment operators should avoid wearing loose clothing, scarves, jewelry, or any items that could become tangled in rotating parts. Any loose hair should be pinned back.
- Exercise caution when working in cold conditions to prevent cold-related injuries such as hypothermia and frostbite. Wear appropriate winter outer garments that ensure operator warmth and visibility.
- Equipment operators should wear insulated, waterproof footwear with good traction to ensure stability and protection from the cold and slippery conditions. Slip-resistant footwear is essential for preventing accidents and maintaining safety during snow removal operations.



Incorporating these best practices for snow removal ensures the optimal functioning of equipment, minimizes risks, and contributes to the overall safety of operators, bystanders, and the surrounding environment.

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RESOURCES

[National Fire Sprinkler Association](#)

[Ready.gov: Winter Weather](#)

[National Weather Service: Weather Radio](#)

[National Weather Service: Alerting Services](#)

Strategies for Preventing Frozen Pipes and Bursts

by Kristin Skorka

As the days grow shorter and temperatures drop, it is crucial for agencies to prepare for the challenges that winter can bring. A common and potentially costly problem during the cold season is frozen pipes. When the temperatures dip low enough, the water in pipes can freeze. As ice builds up in a single location, it applies pressure to the pipe, leaving it vulnerable to bursting. A burst pipe can release gallons of water into a facility in just a short amount of time, causing significant structural and water damage. Fortunately, taking proactive steps can prevent these situations from occurring.

Key strategies to preventing pipe freezes and pipe burst include:

- **Monitor Weather Forecasts:** By keeping track of upcoming cold temperatures, agencies can take preventative action before freezing conditions set in. Install a reliable weather application on your smartphone or set up custom alerts to get real-time weather updates, forecasts, and temperature trends.
- **Proactive Heating System Maintenance:** Regularly inspect and maintain heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, boilers, and radiators to ensure consistent heating.
- **Use Heat Tape or Cables:** Apply electric heat tape or heat cables along pipes, especially for pipes in vulnerable areas. These can be turned on during cold periods to maintain a consistent temperature.
- **Install Low Temperature Alarms:** These devices are designed



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to give an alert when the temperature drops below a preset threshold.

- **Leak Detection Systems:** These systems monitor water pressure and flow, and can detect early signs of freezing or leaks.
- **Keep Water Moving:** Water moving through the pipes is less likely to freeze. During extreme cold, turn faucets to a slow drip.
- **Seal Leaks and Drafty Areas:** Look for any gaps, cracks, or holes where cold air can enter the building, especially in areas with plumbing. Use caulking, weather-stripping, or insulation to seal these areas.
- **Maintain Consistent Indoor Temperatures:** Even in areas that are not heavily used, such as storage rooms or mechanical spaces, it is important to maintain a consistent temperature of 50°F.
- **Open Cabinet Doors:** If pipes are located under sinks or in cabinets, leave those doors open to allow warm air to circulate around the pipes.
- **Winterize Outdoor Water Systems:** Drain and disconnect outdoor water lines and sprinkler systems to prevent freezing. Turn off the water supply to outdoor faucets and drain any remaining water in the lines. Use frost-proof faucet covers and hose bibs to provide additional protection.
- **Keep Exterior Doors Closed:** Keeping the facility or shop doors closed helps retain heat and keeps cold air from entering. If possible, install weather-stripping around the doors to seal gaps and prevent drafts.
- **Insulate Exposed Pipes:** Properly insulate pipes in vulnerable areas like attics, basements, and exterior walls to protect them from cold temperatures.
- **Backup Heat Sources:** In areas prone to power outages, have an alternative heat source, such as a generator or portable heater. Keep fresh, additional fuel on hand.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Develop protocols for pipe bursts, locate water shut-off valves, and train designated staff in handling frozen pipes.
- **Winterize the Fire Protection System:** Consider using dry-pipe systems in colder areas, which are filled with compressed air instead of water until activated by a fire. Inspect and test antifreeze solutions, if used, to ensure they are in compliance with safety standards set by the National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA).



Understanding How to Identify Frozen Pipes

Despite best efforts, there may still be times when pipes freeze. Assessing and identifying frozen pipes is a critical task during cold weather to prevent further damage and restore water flow. The first step is to check areas of the building that are prone to freezing, such as exterior walls, basements, attics, crawl spaces, and any place with inadequate insulation or heat. Signs of frozen pipes include reduced or no

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water flow when faucets are turned on, visible frost on pipes, and unusual sounds, such as gurgling or clanking, from the plumbing. Additionally, localized cold spots on walls or floors near pipes may indicate freezing. If a frozen pipe is presumed, inspect it carefully for bulging or cracks, as these are signs the pipe may be under pressure and at risk of bursting. Quick identification and thawing are crucial to prevent severe water damage.

How to Safely Thaw Pipes

Knowing how to safely thaw pipes can prevent further damage. Begin by opening the faucets connected to the frozen pipes to relieve pressure and allow water to flow once thawed. Use safe heat sources such as electric heating pads, heat lamps, or hair dryers to warm the pipes gradually. Avoid using open flames or propane torches, as they can damage pipes or cause fires. Insulate the surrounding areas to prevent further freezing. Agencies should maintain a list of experienced contractors or internal resources that can respond. Always ensure that any heating equipment used complies with safety standards to prevent accidents.

Preventing pipe freezes and breaks requires a combination of insulation, temperature control, and proactive winterizing efforts. By understanding the risks and taking steps to protect exposed pipes, agencies can significantly reduce the likelihood of frozen pipes and the resulting damage from pipe bursts. Ultimately, taking these preventative actions not only protects property but also provides peace of mind during the winter months.

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RESOURCES

[Caltrans Weathering the Storm:
Winter Driving Tips](#)

[Caltrans Road Information](#)

[Caltrans Winter Driving Tips](#)

[Caltrans Chain Controls/
Installation](#)

Winter Driving Safety

by Sarah Bruno, ARM

When the days become shorter and the weather cooler, it's time to start preparing for driving in winter weather. Winter weather in California can include: rain, snow, fog, and ice – and can catch you off guard as weather changes quickly. The 2 main ways to ensure an agency is prepared are safe equipment and safe practices, both are outlined below.

Ensure the vehicle is prepared for winter weather

Make sure the vehicle is in good working order. This means ensuring the vehicle has been taken in for routine service, according to manufacturers' specification and agency procedures. In addition to regular vehicle system inspection and maintenance, the following should be included as part of a winter pre-trip inspection:

- Check tire tread depth and pressure.
- Check wiper blades for deterioration.
- Check windshield fluid level – ensure there is sufficient fluid and the appropriate type for freezing prevention as needed.
- If the vehicle is not equipped with 4-wheel drive and will be driven in the snow, ensure the correct tire chains are present. Chain installation and removal training may be required for drivers.
- Snow should be removed from the entire vehicle (not just the windshield) before driving, ensure the appropriate tool for the job is present (ice scraper and snow brush).
- Update the emergency supplies and include warm blankets and clothing.



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Safe practices

While some safe driving practices should be applied year-round, winter weather brings with it additional hazards on the road. The following safe practices should be followed when driving during winter weather:

- Limit distractions – this includes eating and using cell phones and other electronics while driving.
- Winter weather can affect not only your visibility but also that of others on the road.
 - Turn on headlights – if wipers are on, headlights must be on per [California law](#). In foggy conditions, headlights (especially fog lights if vehicle is equipped with them) are also helpful but avoid using high-beams as this can impair your ability to see down the road.
 - Increase following distance and slow down – traction is reduced by water on the road, slow down at least 5-10 mph when roads are wet.
- Avoid sudden stops and quick direction changes.
- Plan for longer travel time.
- Consider providing training for employees required to drive in rainy and inclement weather.
- Ensure a reliable means of communication should an accident or delay occur. Check in with a supervisor or other contact before departure and when the destination is reached safety.
- Monitor weather conditions and forecasts along your route – consider if the trip should be postponed for safety.
- Check road conditions before departure and monitor along the route as road conditions are constantly changing.
- Understand the three levels of chain requirements in California and the equipment of the vehicle (four, front or rear wheel drive? Snow tires?). Snow tires in California will have the M+S (mud and snow) imprint [see photo example].
- Appropriate footwear should be worn to prevent slip and falls in snow or ice around the vehicle.



While these reminders are helpful, it is also important to reference/review agency policies and procedures that govern driving a motor vehicle on behalf of your employer. Review these winter driving safety reminders each year with employees to ensure preparedness and safety on the road.

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Workplace Decoration Safety

by Chandler Wright

Occasions like holidays, birthdays, back to school, and other special events bring lots of excitement and the desire to decorate. Decorations are a great way to help celebrate in the workplace, but if done incorrectly, these same festive items can cause unintentional hazards and get in the way of employee's doing their job.

Fire Hazards:

Decorations in the workplace often lead to additional fire/life safety hazards. Having decorations in the wrong places could cause fire suppression equipment to not function the way it is meant to or may prevent a safe evacuation. Decorations should not block exits, exit signage, fire suppression equipment, or electrical panels. Nothing should be hung or tied on to fire sprinklers, smoke detectors, or fire alarms. This equipment is very important for everyone's safety and must remain in good working condition.

Employees should err on the side of caution and keep flammable decorations to a minimum, especially flammable wall decorations. Wall decorations can be treated with flame-retardant solutions approved by the State Fire Marshall to help prevent fire hazards. Decorations and learning material in schools must not cover more than 50% of the wall space if the school has sprinklers. Candles, or anything else with an open flame, should not be used.

Plants, including Christmas trees, should be maintained in a healthy condition and appropriately watered to help avoid a fire hazard. They should be inspected daily for any indication that they are becoming too dry.

Electrical Hazards:

Electrical hazards have the potential to cause injury to workers, fires, or problems with the electrical power of the workplace. To help prevent electrical hazards, employees should only use UL-approved power strips and extension cords with overcurrent protection. Power strips and/or extension cords should never be connected to one another (often called "daisy-chaining").



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Any decorations with lights should be turned off before leaving the workplace. Leaving these lights on could lead to overheating and potentially cause a fire. Lights, and other electrical decorations, should always have their wires checked for any damage before being used. Electrical items with frayed or damaged wiring should not be used. To help prevent damage to the wires, do not use items such as nails, tacks, or staples to hang lights or cords. Damaged wires also have the potential to start a fire or cause electrical injury to employees.

Injuries:

Employees are often exposed to additional hazards when decorating the workplace, such as the use of ladders, lifting and material handling, and slips, trips, and falls. Employees should never stand on rolling chairs or desks in order to hang or display items. Sturdy ladders or step stools should always be used when putting up decorations. When moving or placing heavy objects, proper lifting techniques should be followed to help avoid injury. If something is too heavy to lift alone, ask for assistance. Anchoring devices used to hang decorations must be of the proper size and strength for the decoration it will hold up. If the anchoring device is inadequate, the items could fall and cause injury.



Walkways should be kept clear, so as to not interfere with sightlines, and be free of trip and fall hazards that could be caused by extension cords, decorations, and/or boxes. If cables must pass through a walkway, you can use cable covers, or tape, to keep them secure to the floor.

Employee Courtesies:



Any employee decorating the workplace should be courteous of others. Employees should take into consideration any substance that coworkers may be allergic or sensitive to and adjust their selections accordingly. Anything that gives off strong aromas or scents should be avoided.

Considerations should be made for any decoration that may be perceived as offensive to others. This may include workplace decorations that are religious, political, unprofessional, sexually explicit or suggestive, racially or ethnically offensive, or sensitive in nature. Signs and symbols may have varied meanings according to different people. Everyone in the workplace should try to be considerate of other people and their views. Employees who are offended or bothered by decorations that a coworker is using should speak with their supervisor.

Employers should communicate their expectations in regards to workplace decorations with all employees. Following the best practices above while decorating the office will help to keep the workplace free from hazards.