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| ***REPLACE WITH YOUR MASTHEAD*** |
| **VFIS logo black JPG** | **SOG Title:** |
| **SOG Number:** |
| **Original Date:** | **Revision Date:** |
| **ABC Fire Department General Operating Guideline** |

**Cold Weather Operations**

***This is a sample of a standard operating guideline (SOG) on this topic. You should review the content, modify as appropriate for your organization, have it reviewed by your leadership team and if appropriate your legal counsel. Once adopted, make sure the SOG is communicated to members, implemented and performance monitored for effective implementation.***

**Purpose:**

Taking preventive action can heIp reduce the risk of hypothermia, which is a very real threat in extreme cold-weather conditions. When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy and result in hypothermia or abnormally low body temperature. Hypothermia is particularly dangerous because it slows the functions of many vital organs, including the brain, and you may not realize it is happening.

**Scope:**

This applies to all personnel working in cold weather environments.

**Procedure:**

Stay alert for signs of hypothermia. These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms of hypothermia are detected, warm the victim up immediately and get medical help as soon as possible.

During periods of extreme cold:

* Make outdoor trips as brief as possible.
* Dress warmly in several layers of loose fitting clothing.
* Cover your mouth and face with a scarf or knit mask to protect your lungs from extremely cold air.
* Keep dry and change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat.
* Avoid exertion as cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart.
* Remain in your vehicle if you become stranded. Keep warm by wrapping your entire body in extra clothing, blankets or newspapers. Move your arms and legs while sitting to improve circulation and stay warmer.
* Watch for signs of frostbite. These consist of loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.

While hypothermia is generally associated with being outdoors, it can occur indoors if your thermostat is set too low, or there is a power outage or heating system failure. Follow these recommendations:

* Conserve heat by avoiding unnecessary opening of doors or windows. Close off unused rooms, stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors and close draperies or cover windows with blankets at night.
* Monitor body temperature of infants less than one year old. Infants should never sleep in a cold room because they lose body heat more easily than adults and can't make enough body heat by shivering.
* Check the temperature in your home often if you are over 65 years of age. Older adults often make less body heat because of slower metabolism and less physical activity.
* Check on elderly friends and neighbors frequently to ensure that their homes are adequately heated.
* Eating a well-balanced meal will help you stay warmer. Do not drink alcoholic or caffeinated beverages as they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly

***This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization’s needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm or damage to personnel, property and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control representative.***

**References:**

Cold Weather Operations Guidance, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Health