

LOGGING/FORESTRY SAFETY SERIES

HYPOTHERMIA

Photo credit: Cornelis F. de Hoop, PhD

Incident Summary:

On February 3rd, a two man crew entered their tree planting site at approximately 6:00 a.m. Gus drove the tractor and Robert rode in a tree-planting trailer behind the tractor. A cold front moved in the night before. The temperature was 32°F with drizzling rain. The high temperature for the day was supposed to be 36°F. The tractor was equipped with a heater, but the trailer was not. It was Robert's first season working as a tree planter. About 9:00 a.m., Gus noticed that the last couple rows were not planted well. There were several spots missing seedlings. He shut down the tractor to check on Robert. Robert was shivering and seemed a bit disoriented. There were 10-15 seedlings on the floor of the trailer where Robert missed the hole. Robert complained of being very cold and tired.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was wrong with Robert?
2. What are the symptoms of hypothermia?
3. How should you respond to a person experiencing hypothermia?
4. How can you prevent hypothermia?

Take Home Message:

Prevent hypothermia by layering warm clothing and protecting ears, face, hands and feet. Recognize the signs of cold stress in co-workers.



Hypothermia:

Hypothermia occurs when your body loses heat faster than it produces heat. Exposure to cold temperatures for long periods of time could cause the following symptoms:

Early Symptoms:

- Shivering
- Fatigue
- Loss of coordination
- Confusion and disorientation

Late Symptoms:

- No shivering
- Blue skin
- Dilated pupils
- Slowed pulse and breathing
- Loss of consciousness

First Aid:

- Alert the supervisor and request medical assistance.
- Move the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove their wet clothing.
- Warm the center of their body first—chest, neck, head, and groin—using an electric blanket, if available; or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm beverages may help increase the body temperature, but do not give alcoholic beverages. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After their body temperature has increased, keep the victim dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.
- If victim has no pulse, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Prevention:

- Wear several layers of loose clothing.
- Cover your ears, face, hands and feet.
- Wear a hat.
- Wear waterproof, insulated boots.
- Take breaks in warmer locations, e.g. a car or truck.
- Carry extra clothes, socks, gloves, hats, and coats in case your clothing gets wet.
- Bring hot drinks to the jobsite in a thermos.
- Include a thermometer and chemical hot packs in your first aid kit.

Information from CDC; <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/>.

