

# PROTECTING OUTDOOR WORKERS FROM EXTREME WEATHER PRECIPITATION

WE ARE YOUR DOL



This document offers New York State Department of Labor’s (NYSDOL) guidance for some of the best ways to keep workers safe before, during, and after an extreme precipitation event. New York State is vulnerable to multiple extreme precipitation events including hurricanes, snowstorms, blizzards, ice storms, floods, and flash floods.

## NEW YORK STATE EMPLOYERS SHOULD TAKE THESE 3 STEPS TO PROTECT OUTDOOR WORKERS FROM EXTREME PRECIPITATION



ALLOW FOR  
**REST & RELIEF**



DEVELOP AND  
**PROVIDE TRAINING**

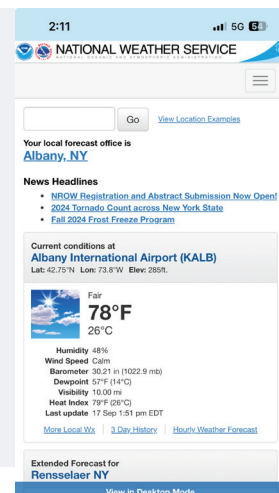


DEVELOP AND  
**PROVIDE A PLAN**

## UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE ALERTS

To determine the appropriate measures to protect workers, employers should follow the alerts issued by the National Weather Service before and during extreme precipitation events. Active alerts for New York State are provided on the National Weather Service website: [alerts.weather.gov/search?area=NY](https://alerts.weather.gov/search?area=NY). Alerts may be one of the following:

- **Advisory or Watch:** Follow local weather reports and be prepared to initiate emergency protocols
- **Warning:** Initiate plans to contact and account for workers, ensure workers can get somewhere safe



## REGARDLESS OF THE WEATHER, EMPLOYERS SHOULD PROVIDE EACH OUTDOOR EMPLOYEE 32 OUNCES OF COOL DRINKING WATER PER HOUR.

Employers should encourage workers to drink water regularly, even when they do not feel thirsty. Workers are more prone to dehydration or forgetting to drink water in times of high stress, when wearing constricting clothing, and when doing physically strenuous work.

- The water should be provided at no cost to workers, available to workers at all times, potable, and as close to the worksite as practicable.
- Workers should be given sufficient time to consume the water.

See the following pages for more detail on each recommended step. **In a unionized workplace, employers must follow any collective bargaining agreement currently in place.**



## REST & RELIEF

Employers should provide breaks, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and consider adjusting work schedules or locations during the wet conditions before, during, and after an extreme precipitation event.

### EMPLOYER BEST PRACTICES FOR EXTREME PRECIPITATION EVENTS ON AN OUTDOOR WORKSITE

#### BEFORE AN EXTREME PRECIPITATION EVENT

*i.e. hurricane watch, storm watch, flood watch, flood advisory, or winter weather advisory*



#### Work Schedule Recommendations

- Reschedule or rearrange work or tasks to avoid wet weather hazards.
- Avoid equipment that uses electricity unless it is rated for working in wet weather
- Provide a warm and dry indoor place for workers to dry off, warm up and change clothes and shoes
- Provide breaks if workers show symptoms of heat or cold stress



#### Employer-Provided PPE Recommendations

- Wet or icy conditions increase the risk of injury by making surfaces more slippery and occluding vision
- Depending on the condition, employers should provide:
  - Gloves that have strong slip-proof grip
  - Ice cleats
  - Anti-fog goggles, spray, or wipes
  - Tools that are rated for outdoor applications and have textured nonslip handles
  - Waterproof boots that have a deep tread to provide traction
- Workers should change clothes and shoes whenever these items become wet

## DURING AN EXTREME PRECIPITATION EVENT

*i.e. hurricane, snowstorm, blizzard, or active flood where water is still rising or moving*



### Work Schedule Recommendations

- Only employees that are trained to work during an extreme precipitation event should be outside
- Initiate weather safety plan



### Employer-Provided PPE Recommendations

- Only trained workers with the appropriate PPE should be outside during an extreme precipitation event
- Professional training should dictate the PPE appropriate to the hazards present and work being done

## AFTER AN EXTREME PRECIPITATION EVENT

*i.e. hurricane, long-term flood, ice storm, or once the storm has passed*



### Work Schedule Recommendations

- Offer workers frequent, paid breaks when doing cleanup work following the extreme precipitation event
- Provide workers who are in or around floodwaters clean water and soap to use for washing hands before work breaks, meal breaks, and at the end of work
- Listen to guidance from local authorities to ensure tap water is safe before using



### Employer-Provided PPE Recommendations

If workers must enter floodwater, employers should provide the following type of PPE depending on the specific situation:

- Waterproof boots with a steel or composite toe, and/or hip-length waders
- Heavy cut-resistant work gloves worn underneath a waterproof latex or nitrile glove to ensure skin is protected from contaminated floodwater
- Full body protection if water is contaminated with biological or chemical hazards
- NIOSH-approved respirators, eye goggles without ventilation holes, and long gloves for workers exposed to mold.<sup>1</sup>
- Insect repellent, sunglasses, sunscreen, hard hats, a personal flotation device, and safety goggles, as needed

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<sup>1</sup> Employers must always be compliant with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) respiratory protection requirements when supplying respiratory protection: [osha.gov/respiratory-protection](https://www.osha.gov/respiratory-protection)



# WORKER & SUPERVISOR TRAINING

Employers should train outdoor workers and supervisors annually and before exposure to heavy rain or snow. In the event of a long-term flood, employers should train workers on working in standing flood water before a worker is asked to work in flood water or with materials that have come in contact with flood water.

## AN EFFECTIVE TRAINING WILL INCLUDE:



Information on the signs and symptoms of illnesses related to exposure to extreme precipitation



Information on the employer's emergency/first aid plans



An overview of the rest and relief measures that the employer will provide to workers during extreme precipitation weather events



An overview of workers' rights to not be retaliated against for reporting any workplace health or safety concern

### Wetness and precipitation can exacerbate cold-related illnesses

Signs & symptoms of common cold-related illnesses, and basic first aid measures, can be found on the National Institute of Occupational Health & Safety (NIOSH) webpage: [cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/coldrelatedillnesses.html](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/coldrelatedillnesses.html). In wet conditions, workers are particularly vulnerable to hypothermia and trench foot.



# PLANNING & PREPAREDNESS

Employers should make a written plan for how they will protect workers from wet weather hazards and handle extreme weather preparedness and emergency response, as well as enact post-storm assessments and protections as necessary.

## THE WRITTEN PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE ELEMENTS SUCH AS, BUT NOT LIMITED TO:



Flexibility measures to move work indoors or postpone until the storm passes or flood waters recede



Methods of alerting affected staff to hazard exposure



Signs and symptoms of common hazards and illness related to extreme precipitation exposure, and basic first aid that workers and supervisors can easily follow



A “buddy system” when extreme precipitation hazards are present



Methods of monitoring the conditions that workers are exposed to



A two-way communication system with workers in the field to ensure supervisors are keeping track of all workers when extreme precipitation weather events occur



Procedures for activating the illness prevention and emergency response plans



Site-specific emergency response procedures including evacuation protocols, storm shelter locations, and what to do in the event of power outage

*Employers should call 911 if symptoms of weather-related illness or life-threatening hazards are present.*

Where applicable, these written plans should be negotiated in good faith and implemented under existing collective bargaining agreements.

## POST-STORM ASSESSMENT:

After a hurricane or during a long-term flood, employers should assess the hazards at a worksite and identify appropriate protections before workers begin work, as storms can leave serious hazards behind.



Standing flood water, downed tree branches, and unstable structures should be handled with caution



Follow guidance of local authorities regarding the safety of entering flood waters and potentially unstable structures



Call 911 if a worksite contains hazards that could be immediately life threatening including downed power lines, damaged utilities, or chemical contamination

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NYSDOL encourages all employers utilize this guidance as needed. Extreme weather hazards in the workplace correlate to higher accident rates, illness, injuries, and deaths. They can also have an impact on a business through increased workers compensation claims, insurance costs, worker utilization of Paid Sick Leave, and overall decreased or diminished worker productivity.

**Employers:** You cannot retaliate against workers for reporting any workplace health or safety concern. For more information on worker rights visit the NYSDOL Public Employee Safety & Health (PESH) Bureau: [dol.ny.gov/public-employee-safety-health](https://dol.ny.gov/public-employee-safety-health) or the Federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) webpages: [osha.gov/](https://osha.gov/).