WEEK 46 LATE NOVEMBER · ~5 MIN READ · ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

Cold & Wet: Early-Winter Rain Gear & Layering

Everyone braces for the deep freeze, but the weather that actually catches crews out is a cold rain at 3 °C. It doesn't look dangerous — above freezing, no snow — so people dress light and push through. Wet is what pulls the heat out of you, and hypothermia doesn't need the thermometer to drop below zero.

The hazard

Water pulls heat off your body far faster than air does, so once your clothes are soaked you cool quickly whatever the temperature reads. You shiver, your hands go numb, and your grip, footing, and focus slip together — that's when the falls, dropped tools, and small mistakes start. Wind makes it faster. Cotton is the worst offender: once it's wet it stays wet, holds cold against your skin, and won't warm back up while you're wearing it.

What to do

- **Layer:** a base that wicks, a warm middle, a waterproof shell on top. **Nothing cotton next to the skin** — wool or synthetics keep working when they're damp.
- **Keep a full dry change on site**, socks included. Dry is the cheapest warmth there is.
- **Add and shed layers as the work changes** so you're not soaking yourself in sweat and then standing still in the wind.
- **Cover up and keep dry — head, hands, and feet especially.** You lose heat from wherever is exposed and unprotected, so it's about total covered area rather than any one magic spot; hands and feet just happen to be what goes numb first and what you need most. Use headwear that's compatible with your hard hat.
- **Warm-up breaks somewhere genuinely warm**, before you're shivering hard, at a frequency that reflects the wet and the wind rather than the calendar.
- **Something warm to drink if you're fully alert and can swallow properly** — and nothing alcoholic.

Watch out for

- **Shivering, slurred speech, clumsiness, confusion, or someone gone quiet — treat that as possible hypothermia, not just "cold."** Get them out of the wet and wind, insulate them, and **call 911 for confusion or any altered mental state**; handle them gently, don't rub them, and stay with them. **Shivering that weakens or stops is getting worse, not better.**
- "I'll dry out as I go." In the cold you won't — wet stays wet and keeps pulling heat the whole time.
- Working up a sweat and then standing still in the wind. That chill lands within minutes.
- Anyone tired, hungry, or already wet — they'll feel it much sooner.

Talk it over

- Does everyone here have a dry spare set, socks included, on site today?
- Where do we warm up, and is it actually warm right now?
- What's the plan if someone gets soaked at 10 a.m. — do they finish the shift wet?

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