USFK Safety Gram

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Tune Yourself Up for Winter Walking

You wake up one morning to the heaviest snowfall of the season. You have to shovel the car out of the driveway. When you arrive at work, you realize no one has even cleared the snow away from the parking lot, walkways, or even building entrances. It's then that you realize that you should have worn snow boots.

With the impending onset of winter, many of us are focused on getting vehicles and driving habits tuned up for the next few months of snow, slush, and ice. That's great, but many people forget that they have to walk from public transportation or their cars to work and often as part of their job, too. Those who aren't prepared can put themselves at risk for not only hypothermia, but also nasty falls and other injuries.

Ensure you are aware of these winter walking hazards:

- Reduced hours of daylight make it much more difficult for drivers to see pedestrians.
- Even though they are called winter boots, some products are much more about fashion than safety. A boot with a smooth sole will increase the hazard of slipping on ice or snow.
- In areas that lack sidewalks, plowed roads are often much narrower in winter. That means approaching drivers have less room to maneuver around pedestrians.
- Many sidewalks aren't cleared of snow, which then hardens into ice and makes walking dangerous.
- If someone is underdressed for weather conditions and it's so cold that all he or she can think of is getting inside a warm building, that person's eyes might be averted to the ground instead of watching for traffic.
- When road conditions get treacherous – especially in a hilly city or town, pedestrians and drivers alike may find themselves unable to stop. Imagine a pedestrian sliding into a busy intersection.
- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue because energy is needed to keep muscles warm.

These winter walking tips can help keep you on your feet:

- Dress for the conditions. Ensure you are warm and visible to traffic.
- Wear footwear with slip-resistant soles. It may not be sexy, but it can help keep you upright.
- If sidewalks are impassible or there aren't any, walk facing traffic as close as possible to the curb.
- Try not to carry heavy packages, which can affect your balance on slippery streets/sidewalks.
- Just because you have the right of way doesn't mean that traffic will be able to stop in slippery conditions. Don't step onto a crosswalk until traffic has stopped.
- Taking shorter steps and bending your knees slightly will reduce your chances of falling.
- Wear bright clothing or reflective gear at night.

Be prepared before you go to work in the cold. That's the key to meeting the challenges of winter work.