

PPE Focus: Cold Weather Risks Seen During Winter Field Inspections Across the U.S.

Winter weather is shaping field work across the country. In the Midwest and Northeast, teams are dealing with extended cold, snow, and freeze–thaw cycles that change site conditions from one day to the next. In the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, cold rain and muddy ground are affecting access and footing. Along the West Coast, repeated storms are bringing heavy rain, shifting temperatures, and limited visibility.

Conditions vary by region, but the effect on field operations is consistent. Winter weather influences site access, equipment performance, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout a full shift.

"Winter weather influences site access, equipment performance, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout a full shift, changing conditions from one day to the next and increasing exposure to risk."

Identifying On-Site Hazards

Slip-and-fall risk remains the most common issue observed during winter field inspections nationwide. In colder regions, ice can form between shifts or re-freeze as temperatures fluctuate. In wetter climates, rain and saturated ground create slick surfaces and unstable footing. Snow, standing water, and debris can obscure uneven ground and temporary access points that would otherwise be visible.

Cold stress and loss of dexterity present differently depending on location. In sustained cold, stiff hands and reduced circulation make it

harder to operate precision instruments or use touchscreen interfaces. In wet or windy conditions, soaked clothing and heat loss lead to fatigue and slower movement. These impacts often appear as reduced fine motor control rather than obvious physical distress.

The "Workaround" Signal

Winter inspections frequently reveal PPE-related workarounds. Inspectors remove gloves to complete detailed tasks, open outer layers to regain mobility, or use traction aids inconsistently as conditions change.

These behaviors signal friction between the task and the gear. When a bulky FR parka restricts range of motion or thick gloves turn a brief data entry task into a prolonged effort, field teams adjust to keep work moving. Over time, these small adjustments can increase exposure to risk.

Planning Makes the Difference

Cold-weather PPE performs best when supported by planning. Warming breaks, sheltered staging areas, task sequencing, and schedule adjustments reduce the pressure to push through harsh conditions. Across regions, winter field inspections consistently show that planning gaps surface before equipment failures.

A safety-first mindset guides how **Intertek** approaches field work. Paying close attention to how the weather affects people, equipment, and site conditions supports safer, more informed decisions when winter risks increase.



LinkedIn Insights (Issue 003)

1.800.WORLDLAB

icenter@intertek.com

intertek.com/building

Click here to subscribe to our LinkedIn Newsletter