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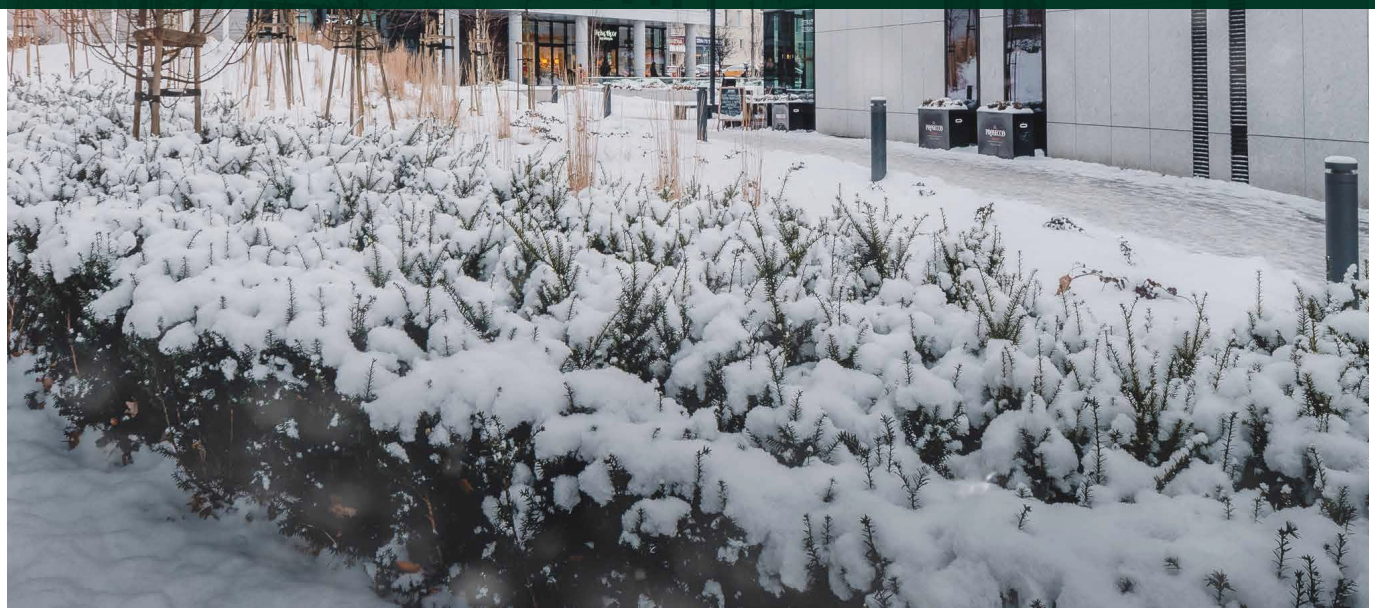
Independent workplace compliance



White Paper

Planning for and managing buildings in cold weather

October 2026



Planning for and managing buildings in cold weather

Managing our buildings in extremes is complex, be that occupation, as we saw during COVID, usage or external conditions (heat, cold, wind, rain etc., for example). Cold weather can be particularly challenging for our premises and estates, as often different circumstances can create different risks that all need to be managed.

Forecasts currently are predicting a mild, wet and possibly stormier start to this winter, with a chance of colder snaps during the early part of 2027. This uncertainty, who knows what the actual weather will bring, means readiness is key and across multiple areas, people, plant, fabric, water, access and business continuity.

Here are some elements, you should be considering:

Create a cold weather/winter management plan

A good and ready supply of grit is of course essential, but not the only aspect of winter preparedness. You need to clearly identify critical assets, vulnerable areas, responsible people, contractors and escalation arrangements and have controls/alternatives in place before any severe weather arrives.

The purpose of any winter/cold weather plan is to minimise potential disruption, protect building assets, and ensure the safety of occupants. Your primary objectives being to:

- Maintain safe access and egress across the site;
- Protect the building fabric and equipment and make sure that building services and other infrastructure remain operational; and
- Reduce the potential for weather-related incidents.

Against these you then need to consider the possibilities of risks such as, cold temperatures, storms, flooding, shorter daylight hours, the disruption they could cause and how you will mitigate these in your plan. In preparing, producing and delivering your plan for your building, aspects to include would be:



Monitor the weather

Have someone with the responsibility for monitoring weather forecasts and severe weather warnings (Weather and climate change - Met Office) and how they will be flagged/reported.

Protect vulnerable pipework

Pipework in external situations, roof spaces, loading bays and other poorly heated areas are very vulnerable to freezing, so inspect all insulation for damage and repair as needed, as well as any trace heating, or indeed the opportunity to invest in some for high-risk systems and services.

Review your heating

Make sure your boilers, heat pumps, burners and controls are serviced and operating effectively.

The HSE, through the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations ACoP (L24) suggests the minimum temperature for working indoors should normally be "at least 16°C or 13°C if much of the work involves rigorous physical effort." Also have a contingency plan in place for what you are going to do should the worst happen and your heating system fails.

Temperature in the workplace: What the law says - HSE

Run a winter heating regime so the building maintains a temperature to prevent any areas freezing, particularly overnight and at weekends. If possible, link your heating system(s) controls to your occupancy sensors and have temperatures automatically adjust according to how building is being used.

Vacant and low-occupancy buildings

Review your portfolio for premises likely to be unoccupied for periods over the winter (satellite offices, storage, lock ups, grounds buildings, etc.). Maintain appropriate levels of heating and increase inspection frequencies for likely issues.



Test frost protection and BMS alarms

Check any and all frost stats, low-temperature alarms and remote monitoring facilities. Identify any areas that are not covered but probably should be and decide on what additional precautions you might need.

Monitor your space temperatures

Gather information on your internal temperatures throughout the building to locate areas prone to "cold" and so at greater risk.

BMS data, sensors or regular physical checks should target perimeter rooms, entrances, lightly/occasionally occupied areas and external plantrooms with critical/susceptible kit and equipment.

Inspect external infrastructure

Schedule the inspection and cleaning of gutters, outlets and downpipes so they will drain properly and effectively over the winter. Check roof areas and external masonry for damage, cracks and deterioration and repair as needed to protect against freezing conditions and high winds causing problems. Check your external lighting arrangements and access routes to make sure they are adequately and appropriate.

Check your backup power arrangements

Review and rationalise your critical assets and emergency power needs, do they match up? Which of your building systems genuinely need emergency power? Where installed, generators, UPS systems or other standby supplies, should be checked, tested and maintained in good working order.

Keep water safety in mind

Winter energy-saving measures, reduced occupancy and/or changes to water use over the winter (well throughout the year in reality), can affect your water management controls, keep them under review so any changes can be identified early and appropriate adjustments/ alternative arrangements employed.

Do develop a formal gritting strategy

Draw up a procedure for your gritting, including by who and when it will be implemented. Assess your routes and how their used, then prioritise relevant entrances, pedestrian routes, steps, ramps, car parks, loading areas and emergency exits.

Emergency arrangements

As part of your plan have a contact list for all inhouse and external people you will need to deliver it, including specialist emergency services. Have a readily available list for the locations of stop valves, electrical isolation points, gas isolation and critical plant at each of your locations.

Where people are working outdoors

Assess the risks for employees working outdoors and the cold-weather PPE/working practices needed (waterproof clothing, footwear, warm rest areas and working times).

Temperature in the workplace: Outdoor working - HSE

Vulnerable building users

Some employees may be at greater risk in cold weather (older people, people with health conditions, lone workers, etc.). Assess these risks and manage accordingly.

Cold weather and health - GOV.UK

Prepare for disruption

Extremely bad weather can cause disruption to building projects and transport. So, projects could be delayed and staff, engineers, deliveries and others planning to visit may not be able to. Agree in advance which activities are critical and which can safely be postponed and what operating levels of supplies – for all eventualities identified - you will need to see you through these periods.

Plan and carry out a post-winter review

Develop a formal review process to determine how and what was adversely affected/ employed as part of your winter plan (health and safety incidents, emergency power, heating failures, supplies and suppliers affected, infrastructure damage, burst pipes, leaks, complaints, contractor callouts, what worked well, etc.). Use this information to refine, inform and improve your future winter plans.



Communicate your plan (last but not least)

Have a process in place to communicate expected weather impacts to occupiers and service providers and what you are doing about them. Engage with senior management formally as part of your planning and involve them in the process. Develop with them a clear escalation process for specific or critical events.

In Summary

Your cold weather/winter management plan, as with many FM related activities, covers a range of disciplines, services and business units. It's successful implementation not only facilitates business operations and continuity, but provides a proactive defined and planned FM process, not just a reaction to a change in the weather.



Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. As your partner in compliance management you will reap the benefit of our more than 40 years' experience of helping customers across a range of different sectors – manage their compliance responsibilities as effectively as possible. If you need any help with your health, safety or environmental compliance, or if you would like more information on the services Assurity Consulting offer, please get in touch.

Call us on
+44 (0)1403 269375

Email us at
info@assurityconsulting.co.uk

Visit our website
assurityconsulting.co.uk