

This Winter, Keep Safe By Walking Like a Penguin

We all know how dangerous it can be to work on a roof or other elevated surface, but we tend to underestimate the potential consequences of falls from lower heights. In reality, a fall of just a few feet can cause serious injury or even death. Ice and snow can make even walking on the ground a deadly risk: dozens of Americans die each year as a result of slipping on ice, and thousands are injured. With that in mind, it's worth looking a little bit silly to stay safe. This winter, if you have to walk on potentially slippery terrain, **try walking like a penguin**. It could save your life.



How to Walk Like a Penguin

1. Keep your hands out of your pockets! Extend them out to your sides to help you keep your balance, like you're walking a tight rope.
2. Bend your knees slightly, point your toes outward a little bit, and walk flat-footed.
3. Take short, slow steps.
4. With each step, keep your center of gravity above your front leg. Normally, we put our leading foot out and let it pull us forward. When you penguin walk, you want to keep your body directly above your foot as you place it.
5. If you do fall backward, try to tuck your chin. That way your back, not your head, will hit the ground first.

Why Does it Work?

The way that we typically walk (with one leg in front of us and one leg trailing) is inherently unstable on slippery surfaces. Our weight pushes our feet outward, along the surface of the ice. By keeping our center of gravity directly above one flat foot, we use our own weight to pin down our foot, preventing slips and falls. Keeping our arms out not only improves our balance, it means that we can catch ourselves if we do fall.

Other tips from the CDC

1. Wear shoes or boots with traction.
2. Be especially careful when entering or exiting a vehicle.
3. Assume that all wet or dark areas on pavement are slippery or icy.



Should You Try the NIOSH Ladder Safety App?

According to a 2014 US Consumer Product Safety Commission report, **more than 500,000 people per year** are treated for ladder-related injuries in the United States. According to a 2017 CDC report, **more than 300 of those people die** each year.

NIOSH identifies five major causes for ladder fall incidents: incorrect extension ladder setup angles, inappropriate ladder selection, insufficient ladder inspection, improper ladder use, and lack of access to ladder safety tools and information, especially among small companies and individual users.

NIOSH has released a free app designed to help solve these problems. Available free for both Android and iOS mobile devices, the app is designed to help people safely use ladders at work and at home. It has visual aids, safety checklists, and information on appropriate ladder use. It also has a tool designed to help people position and angle their ladders correctly. The app can be downloaded for free from the iOS app store or the Google Play Store.

Of course, an app is only a tool. There is no substitute for cautious, thoughtful use of every tool—especially including hazardous tools like ladders—on the job.

See more information at the [NIOSH ladder safety app webpage](#).

Tips for Safe Winter Driving

Even under the best of circumstances, driving is one of the most hazardous things that we do. In the winter, we need to take particular care to avoid accidents that could harm us, other motorists, or pedestrians. We also need to think about what we'll do if we become stranded. Remember the three P's of safe winter driving: **prepare** for the trip, **protect** yourself and your family, and **prevent** crashes on the road.

Prepare

- **Maintain your car.** Check your battery, tire treads, and windshield wipers. Keep your windows clear, put no-freeze fluid in the washer reservoir, and check your antifreeze.
- **Have on hand** a flashlight, jumper cables, abrasive material (sand, kitty litter, even floor mats) in case your car gets stuck in the snow, shovel, snow brush and ice scraper, warning devices (like flares), and blankets. For long trips, add food and water, medication, and a cell phone if possible.
- **For electric and hybrid-electric vehicles,** minimize the drain on your battery. If the vehicle has a thermal heating pack for the battery, plug in your vehicle whenever it's not in use. Pre-heat the passenger compartment before you unplug your vehicle in the morning.
- **When renting a car,** become familiar with the vehicle before driving it off the lot. Know the location of the hazard lights switch in case of emergency, and review the owner's manual so that you're prepared for any driving situation that may arise.
- **Plan your route.** Allow plenty of time to reach your destination so you don't have to rush (check the weather and leave early if necessary), be familiar with the directions (even if you use a GPS) so you can keep your eyes on the road, and let others know your route and expected time of arrival so they'll know if something goes wrong.
- **Practice your cold-weather driving:**
 - During daylight, rehearse maneuvers slowly on ice or snow in an empty lot.
 - If you skid, steer into it.

- See your vehicle's manual to familiarize yourself its features—such as antilock brakes and electronic stability control—and how the features perform in slippery conditions. For example, your vehicle or pedals may pulsate when controlling traction.
- Remember that stopping distances are longer on ice.
- Don't idle for a long time with the windows up or in an enclosed space.
- **Stopped or stalled?** Stay in your car, don't overexert yourself, put bright markers on your antenna or windows, and keep your interior dome light turned on so that others can see you. If you run your car, make sure the exhaust pipe is clear and run your engine just enough to stay warm.

Protect Yourself and Your Family

- Buckle up and use child safety seats properly.
- Never place a rear-facing infant seat in front of an air bag.
- Children 12 and under are much safer in the back seat.

Prevent Crashes

- Slow down and increase the distance between yourself and the car in front of you.
- Avoid fatigue. Get plenty of rest before the trip, stop at least every three hours, and rotate drivers if possible.
- Don't use cruise control.
- Keep your eyes open for pedestrians walking in the road.
- Drugs and alcohol never mix with driving. Neither does texting.
- If you are planning to drink, designate a sober driver.

Heartland Center Trainees Receive OSH Scholarships

Two Heartland Center trainees were awarded scholarships at the 46th Annual Iowa Governor's Safety & Health Conference on November 2, 2017. **Darrin Thompson**, a PhD student in the Occupational Epidemiology training program, received the Jack Beno Scholarship. **Shaunae Alex**, an MS student in the Industrial Hygiene training program, received the Bill Dickonson Scholarship. Iowa State University student Ria Gasaway also received an Iowa Occupational Safety & Health Advisory Council Scholarship. The Heartland Center is always proud to see our students honored for their scholastic excellence.



Pictured above, L-R: Iowa Labor Commissioner Michael A. Mauro, Paul Richmond (Iowa OSH Advisory Council Treasurer), Ria Gasaway, Shaunae Alex, Darrin Thompson, Steven Flann (Iowa OSH Advisory Council Chair), and Jacqueline Roberts (Iowa OSH Advisory Council member).

Use of Illicit Drugs Continues to Rise Among Safety-Sensitive US Workforce

A [recent analysis](#) by Quest Diagnostics, a major provider of drug tests, shows that illicit drug use continues to rise among American workers, including workers in “safety-sensitive” jobs who are federally mandated to be tested. The overall rate of positivity in workforce drug tests provided by Quest in 2016 was 4.2%, which is a five percent relative increase over the previous year’s rate of 4% and the highest rate that Quest has found since 2004.

Drug Test Positivity by Category: In 2016, the rate of cocaine positivity in the safety-sensitive workforce increased by 7%, the rate of positivity for methamphetamines increased by more than 8%, and the rate of marijuana positivity increased nearly 10%, which represents the largest increase in five years. In each case, these increases continue long-term trends.

Legal Marijuana Drives Increases: Positivity for marijuana in urine drug tests rose more than twice as fast in Colorado and Washington, where recreational use has been legalized, than in the nation as a whole. This marks a change from previous years, where marijuana positivity was not significantly higher in these states. As quoted in an article in the publication [Transport Topics](#), Abigail Potter, manager of safety and occupational health policy at American Trucking Associations, speculated that workers may not understand that regardless of state laws, holders of commercial driver licenses are not permitted to use substances like marijuana.

A Reduction in Opiate Use: Quest did find a decline in prescription opiate positivity in the workforce, including hydrocodone, hydromorphone, and oxycodones. Their analysts connected this reduction to government efforts to restrict opiate prescriptions in response to the current opioid crisis. Furthermore, they found that heroin use among the general workforce plateaued in 2016 and actually declined slightly among the safety-sensitive workforce.

Region 7 Numbers: The overall positivity rate in 2016 was 3.7% in Iowa and 3.3% in Nebraska, both lower than the national rate of 4.2%. However, the overall positivity rate was 4.3% in Missouri and 4.8% in Kansas—both higher than the average.

Additional Reading: Our colleagues at the Injury Prevention Research Center have recently released [policy and program recommendations](#) to reduce opioid overdose and deaths in Iowa, with insights that may be more broadly applicable throughout the region.

Want to Help Combat Prescription Drug Addiction? Use Your State’s PDMP

Medical providers who want to help fight back against prescription drug addiction and overdoses should consider checking their state’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program before prescribing potentially addictive controlled substances. You can learn more about PDMPs from the CDC at cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdmp/states.html.



Continuing Education Programs

Check out the Heartland Center’s new [online events calendar](#) to keep track of our upcoming continuing education events.

Please also follow the Heartland Center on social media for regular occupational health and safety updates:



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