

CWU CLIMATE Risks Advisory Guidance

Outdoor workers—from construction crews and utility teams to agricultural and delivery workers—face increasing risks as extreme weather events become more frequent and intense. Below is a structured breakdown of the key hazards.



All Unions need to react to the fact that climate change is increasing the severity and prevalence of known occupational hazards, as well as the development of new hazards. Most at risk are our outdoor workers, although workers in hot indoor environments are also at risk. We have all recently observed climate related increases in our exposure to elevated temperatures, more frequent, severe or longer-lasting extreme events, degraded air quality, and stresses to our mental health and well-being.

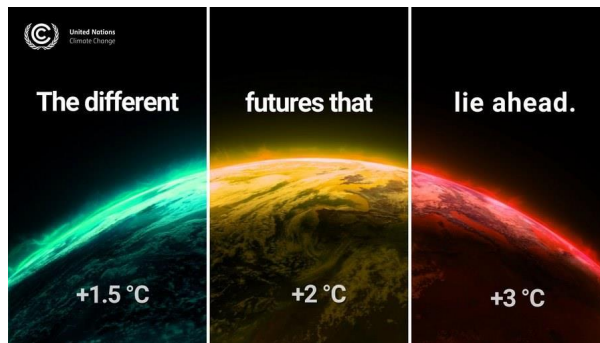
All of these ‘work related climate change risks’ **are expected to worsen** with continued climate change. Some of these weather-related threats will occur over longer time periods, or at unprecedented times of the year. Some workers will be exposed to weather hazards not previously experienced.

Trade union best practice should be communicated to allow for **potential integration into other trade unions risk assessment processes**. The already visible impacts of climate change and the future impacts that can be anticipated demonstrates that we need to raise the urgency to deploy newer more effective risk control measures.

Trade union collaboration is becoming an important need, to provide information on campaigns and ‘fit for purpose’ safe systems of work must be introduced to allow for

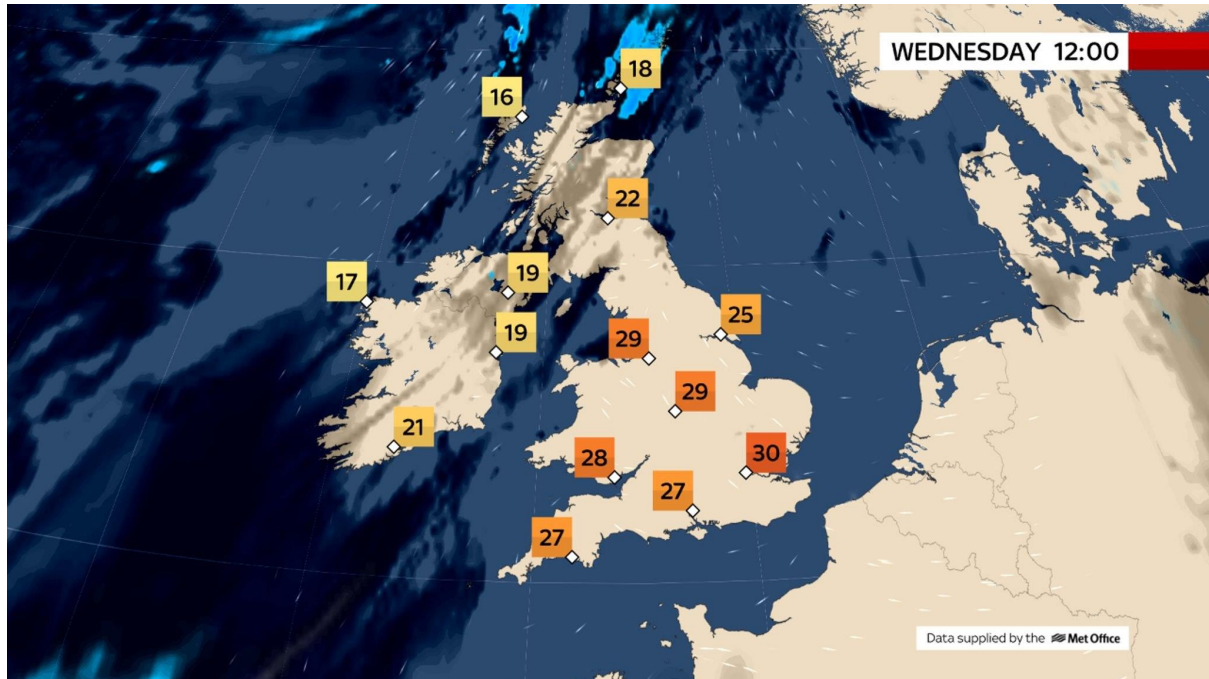
dynamic risk assessment judgement calls for all workers becoming a 'norm' rather than the 'unexpected'. **As changes in extreme seasonal weather will likely bring harsh winters and extreme summers.** The following video link explains this 'different future' in more detail.

[The different future - Climate risks ahead](#)



Think of C.L.I.M.A.T.E as your safety acronym

CHECK THE FORECAST



Weather Apps and Weather Decisions
— Let's Make the Most of Both —



Checking the weather forecast regularly has now become more important than ever- MAKE SURE YOU DO THIS FROM A RELIABLE SOURCE

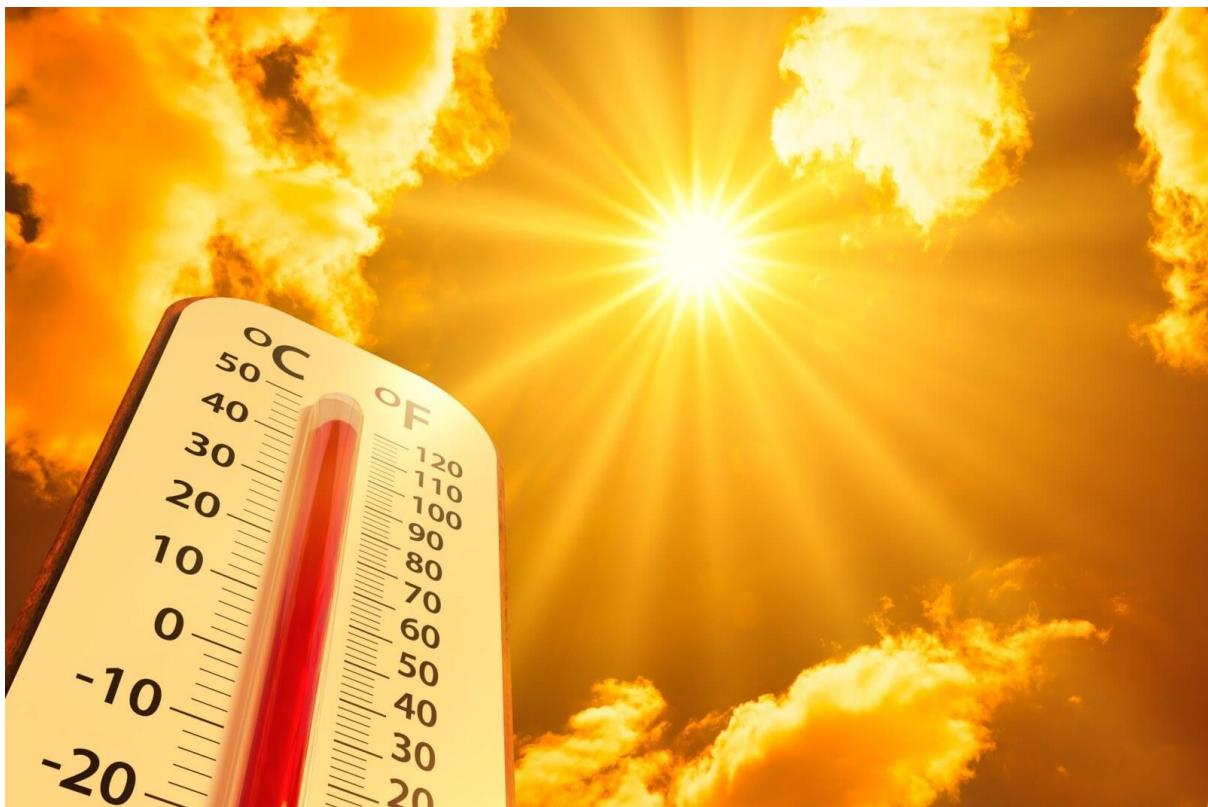
You can also familiarise yourself with useful safety information such as - **Wet-bulb Global temperature**: What it is, how to use it and how is it directly linked to human risk factors in

extreme heat? and why is it potentially important to Trade Unions? This system is far more useful at predicting heat related risks for outdoor workers than ordinary dry bulb thermometers. Wet Bulb Global Temperature system is the HIDDEN HEAT METRIC that trade unions need to know about. Industry and Military worldwide, including NATO, use WBGT to protect from high core body temperature and internal heat damage to vital organs. Heat Stress prevention demands accurate measurement and analysis of heat stress in the outdoor workplace

By providing a realistic measure of heat stress, WBGT enables employers to implement effective, inexpensive heat safety protocols, ensuring the well-being of their workforce while maintaining operational efficiency.

[Extech HT30 Heat Stress WBGT \(Wet Bulb Globe Temperature\) Meter](#) is a typical example WBGT thermometer but useful WBGT information is **readily available** For example [Get the best weather information HERE](#)

LIMIT EXPOSURE TO RISK



REMEMBER you do not have carry on working if you believe you are facing serious and imminent danger

Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 gives workers the legal right **not to suffer detriment** (e.g., loss of pay, disciplinary action, being forced to do unsafe tasks) if they refuse to work in situations where they reasonably believe they face **serious and imminent danger**.

According to the latest available revised legislation (updated to November 2025) from the UK government's official legislation site, Section 44 is very much in force and remains part of current law. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/44>

- Employers are duty-bound to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare at work of their employees (HASAW Act).
- Employers must undertake risk assessments to identify hazards in the workplace, including climate change-related hazards such as severe weather.
- Measures to reduce the risk of harm to employees should be implemented. If conditions change, such as the risk of extreme temperatures, employers should review and update risk assessments accordingly.
- Employers must protect staff who are particularly vulnerable to heat, especially those requiring individual risk assessments

IDENTIFY EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Listen to what your body is telling you..

The signs of heat injuries include:

- a headache
- dizziness and confusion
- loss of appetite and feeling sick
- excessive sweating and pale, clammy skin
- cramps in the arms, legs and stomach
- fast breathing or pulse
- a high temperature of 38C or above
- being very thirsty

The signs of Cold injuries include:

Initial signs :

- Feeling very cold
- Stiffness, tiredness
- Violent shivering
- Increased heart rate

- Irrational behaviour

Later signs :

- Probably not shivering
- Stiff limbs - rigid joints
- Confusion or loss of consciousness

Freezing cold injury (FCI) is a significant cause of disability. Parts of the body most prone to freezing are the extremities and exposed areas - face, fingers, toes, heels and soles of the feet.

Be aware of Frost nip. Where people normally recover fully if the right action is taken

First Aid for Frostnip:

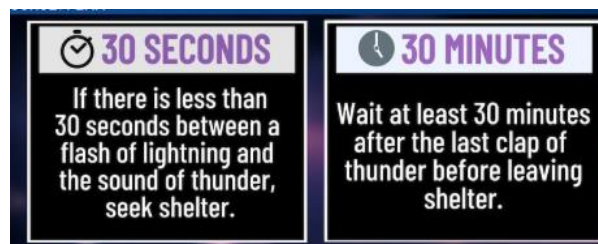
If you suspect that you or someone else is experiencing frostnip, there are various first aid measures you can take. These include:

- Moving to a warm area: Get out of the cold and find shelter indoors.
- Remove wet clothing: Wet clothing can make the condition worse, so remove any wet clothing and replace it with warm, dry clothes.
- Warm the affected area: Use warm water to warm up the affected area. Place the affected body part in warm water at around 40°C and maintain this temperature until the sensation returns.
- Do not rub the affected area: Rubbing the affected area **can cause more damage**, so avoid rubbing it to warm it up.
- Elevate the affected area: Elevate the affected body part to reduce swelling.

[TUC Too hot, Too Cold guide.](#)

Listen to what the weather may be telling you....Lightning safety protocols ("30–30 rule")

Lightning strikes the ground in Britain about **300,000 times a year**. this is a worker risk that must be considered. Although there is no absolute protection from lightning, measures can be taken to reduce the risk of getting struck and the injury severity.



The risk

30-60 people are struck by lightning each year in the UK, and on average, 3 to 6 (5-10%) of these strikes are fatal

30/30 rule & ROSPA guidance.

Research shows that people struck by lightning are predominantly **hit before and after the peak of the storm**. This means that you should be thinking about the proximity of the lightning, not the occurrence of rain.

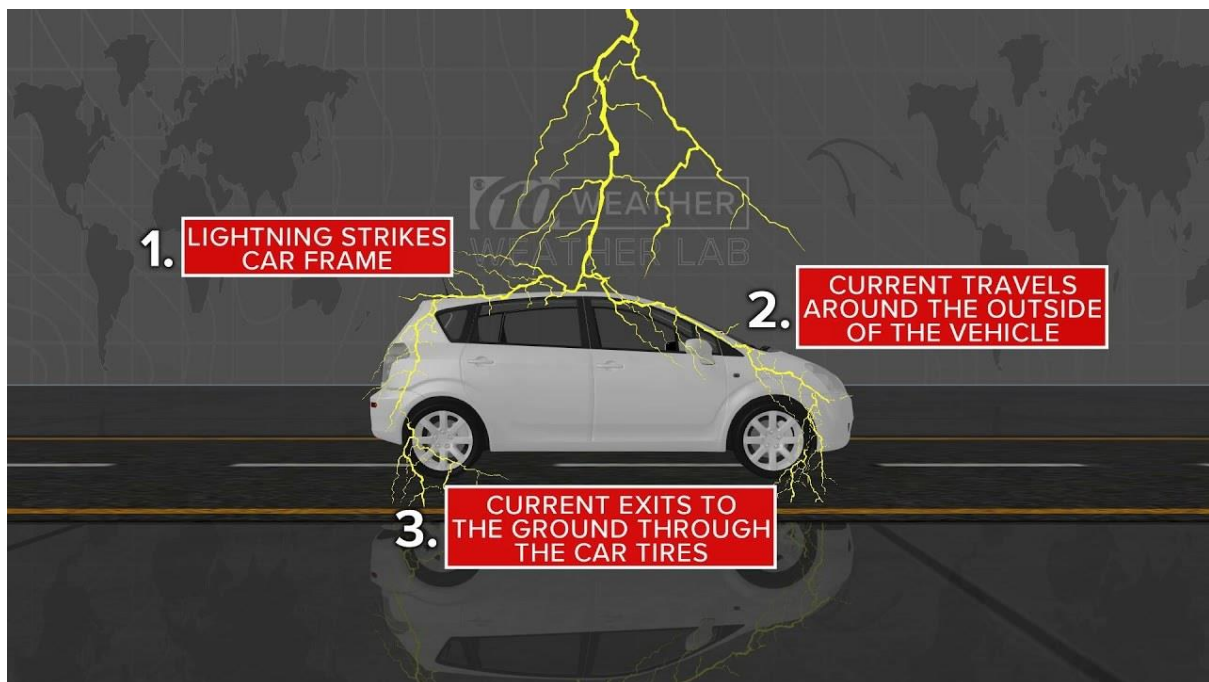
The 30/30 rule provides a good way of ensuring one is sheltering during the most risky parts of the storm. **It proposes that if the flash to bang is 30 seconds in length or less you should seek shelter.** Staying inside this shelter is advised until 30 minutes past the last clap of thunder. This ensures that any distant strikes at the beginning of the storm (lightning can travel up to 10 miles), or trailing storm clouds at the back of the storm do not take anyone by surprise. Employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their staff under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 Section 2(1). If staff are working outdoors in exposed areas, this must be reflected in the risk assessment.

MAKE SAFETY CONCIIOUS DECISIONS



STAY SAFE IN YOUR WORK VEHICLE IF YOU CAN'T ESCAPE THE STORM- CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW TO UNDERSTAND THE 'FARRIDAY' EFFECT.

[How to stay safe in your car during a storm](#)



YOUR PPE COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOU REALISE



Have you ever wondered how well your work clothing protects you from UV radiation? This is where the EN 13758 standard for UV protection comes into play: it specifies which clothing really protects against dangerous UV rays

The European standard 13758 specifies the labelling requirements for clothing intended to protect the wearer against exposure to ultraviolet solar radiation. The standard specifies how the protection factor of clothing is measured and what must be stated on the label so that wearers can easily orientate themselves.

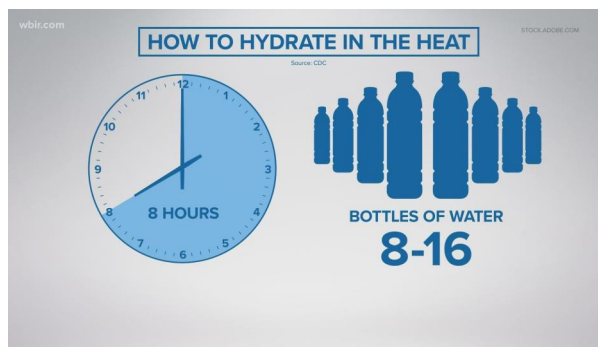
Clothing is an obvious source of protection against UVR exposure, but its effectiveness is not often fully quantified. The EN13758 standard is divided into two parts:

- EN 13758-1 describes the method for measuring the UV protection factor (UPF), i.e. how well the material blocks UV rays.

- EN 13758-2 specifies how clothing that offers this protection should be labelled so that consumers can quickly identify which products really provide protection.

‘DELIBERATE DEHYDRATION’ RISKS FOR OUTDOOR WORKERS.

A report in 2019 by the Royal Society of Public Health cited that over half (56%) of the public **restrict fluid intake** due to concern **over lack of toilet facilities**. THIS IS A HUGE RISK FOR OUTDOOR WORKERS



Taking the P*: the decline of the great British public toilet**

Older people, Policy, High street, General 23 May 2019

RSPH has published a report revealing the dire state of our public conveniences and its impact on the public's health



Deliberate dehydration can seriously affect health and exacerbate existing medical problems. The increasing decline in public toilets is a threat to health, mobility, and equality. The lack of public toilets disproportionately affects people with ill health or disability, the elderly, women, **outdoor workers** and the homeless.

With Climate change comes the need to be drinking more, with drinking more comes the need to go to the toilet more.

A recent study by Sheffield University on outdoor workers in the delivery sector identified

- Significant Work intensification
- Driving without due rest due to time constraints.
- **Poor Access to toilet facilities.**

Trade unions must continue to campaign for more organisations to support schemes such as the 'Just can't wait' and champion the retail shops that are fully recognising and supporting the 'just can't wait' scheme, which allows outdoor workers and members of the public **with bowel or bladder disability or certain health conditions** to access in store toilets upon presentation of the 'just can't wait' card. Co-Op (4,050 stores)

M&S (Over 950 stores)

Argos, (over 800 stores)

Superdrug (over 800 stores)

Waitrose. (349 stores)

B&Q (Over 300 stores)

White stuff. (Over 100 stores)

Zara. (Over 100 stores)

In addition to the above, do trade unions need to raise awareness of Toilet Map UK? This is a website aims to be a complete, up-to-date, sustainable source of toilet locations. It's the UK's largest database of publicly accessible toilets with over 14,000 facilities.

<https://www.toiletmap.org.uk/loos/319be340e8d51ca7c2bd210d>

Toilet Map UK simply seek of advice of all publicly accessible toilets, that means all toilets that the public can access without needing to be a customer.

This includes:

- public toilets
- toilets in train stations, bus stations, service/petrol stations, tube stations, ferry terminals, airports and other transport networks
- shopping centre toilets
- toilets in public buildings, such as town halls, libraries, hospitals, museums and leisure centres

- toilets in other businesses where the business agrees that the public can use their toilets without having to buy anything. These are often part of Community Toilet Schemes (run by councils) and can include shops, cafes, supermarkets, restaurants, hotels and pubs.

ACT SOONER RATHER THAN LATER

Some weather situations will bring impacts from more than one type of weather.

Dual Weather situations **can develop quickly** This could include a storm when impacts from both wind and rain may bring disruption. If a serious weather situation is developing, do not assume it will soon pass.

Any of the eight weather types can form a dual weather situation in a number of combinations. The eight weather types are:

rain ,thunderstorms, wind ,snow, lightning, ice ,extreme heat, fog

EACH OF THESE WEATHER SITUATIONS CAN CREATE SERIOUS RISKS FOR OUTDOOR WORKERS.

RISK ASSESS ALWAYS, RISK ASSUME NEVER

RISK ASSUMPTION IS THE DANGEROUS PROCESS OF ACCEPTING THE CONSEQUENCES OF RISK

THINK ABOUT OTHERS



VULNERABLE WORK COLLEAGUES ARE OFTEN AT HIGHER RISK IN EXTREME WEATHER

Hot weather and heatwaves can worsen many underlying medical conditions and increase the risk of heat stress, heat exhaustion, or heat stroke.

1. Cardiovascular (Heart) Conditions

People with heart disease are at significant risk because heat places extra strain on the cardiovascular system. Conditions include:

- Ischemic heart disease
- Coronary heart disease
- Heart failure

Heat forces the heart to work harder to cool the body. Those with weakened hearts may struggle to keep up.

2. Respiratory Conditions Hot weather and increased air pollution can worsen:

- Asthma
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

- Other chronic lung diseases
- **3. Diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2)** People with diabetes may have:
 - Impaired ability to regulate body temperature
 - Higher risk of dehydration
 - Medication/equipment sensitivity (e.g., insulin degrades in heat)

Heat can also disrupt blood glucose control.

4. Kidney (Renal) Disease Kidney disease, including chronic kidney disease, increases susceptibility because:

- Heat can worsen dehydration
- The kidneys may struggle to balance fluids and electrolytes

Extreme heat can intensify renal strain.

5. Mental Health Conditions Conditions that increase vulnerability include:

- Mood disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Some antidepressants interfere with the body's ability to cool itself. Certain medications used for chronic illnesses—including antidepressants—can increase sensitivity to heat by disrupting the body's ability to regulate temperature, fluids, or electrolytes.

6. Pregnancy Pregnant individuals may face:

- Higher risk of dehydration
- Increased risk of preterm birth or low birth weight linked to high temperatures

EXTREME COLD WEATHER CAN ALSO HAVE AN IMPACT ON KNOWN HEALTH CONDITIONS

1. Arthritis and Chronic Pain Disorders

Conditions such as:

- Osteoarthritis
- Fibromyalgia
- General chronic joint pain

often worsen in cold weather due to muscle tightening and changes in barometric pressure, which increase stiffness, swelling, and pain.

2. Endocrine Conditions

Certain hormonal disorders can make cold weather more dangerous:

- Underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism)
- Underactive adrenal gland (adrenal insufficiency)

These conditions impair the body's ability to regulate temperature and maintain normal metabolic heat.

3. Poor Circulation / Peripheral Vascular Disease

Reduced circulation increases the risk of:

- Frostbite
- Nerve damage in extremities

Frostbite risk is significantly higher for people with circulation problems.

4. Dyspraxia or Cognitive Impairment

Impaired Motor Coordination Worsened by Stiffness and Cold

Dyspraxia involves:

- Impaired coordination
- Difficulty performing fine and gross motor tasks
- Challenges with motor planning and postural stability

Impaired judgment or slowed reaction increases danger in cold conditions, especially when hypothermia sets in unnoticed.

People unable to recognize early symptoms—such as confusion, slurred speech, or fatigue—are at higher risk.

5. Raynaud's disease

Cold Temperatures can Trigger Vasospasms

Raynaud's attacks are directly triggered by cold environments. Even brief exposure to cold air, cold objects, or sudden temperature drops can cause blood vessels to constrict sharply.

EVALUATE AFTER EACH SEVERE WEATHER EVENT



Reassess the environment

- Look for new hazards: water pooling, slippery surfaces, fallen objects, structural shifts, weakened ground, limited access routes.
- Check if weather has affected visibility, lighting, or noise levels.

Inspect equipment and PPE

- Ensure tools, machinery, and electrical systems haven't been compromised by water, wind, or temperature changes.
- Confirm PPE is still fit for purpose (e.g., dry, intact, undamaged).

Review work plans

- Revisit risk assessments and permits.
- Decide if the task needs to be paused or modified

Communicate changes

- Talk to others about altered conditions.
- Adjust work controls where needed.

REPORT NEAR MISSES

**A Near Miss
Not Reported
Is The Next Accident**



Report ANY Near Misses

Immediately

A near miss after extreme weather is a warning sign that conditions have changed faster than expected.

Good reporting includes communicating on

- What happened
- What conditions contributed (wind, rain, ice, flooding, heat, etc.)
- The potential consequences
- What prevented the incident
- What corrective actions are needed

What is happening in Europe... **Did you know...**



UNI Europa PostSkills Seminar Paris, 27 January identified the major trends expected to shape postal delivery model in Europe include technological change, global parcel growth, **urbanisation**, and **climate change**. AI and digital technologies are rapidly reshaping mail and parcel delivery work. Can AI influence risk based predictions? La Poste reported a 50% reduction in workplace accidents through AI-based risk forecasting.

Austrian Post presented the growing importance of both physical and psychological safety in delivery roles. Key issues include severe weather challenges, as these often directly link to occupational road risks & slips and falls.

27c has been seen by the general consensus for an upper limit on outside working. Spain already has this in place. [Heat stress is projected to reduce total working hours](#) worldwide by 2.2% and global GDP by £2,400 billion by 2030, according to the International Labour Organisation. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2023 identifies failure to mitigate the effects of climate change as the [biggest risk facing the world](#) in the next decade. And, in fact, the top 10 risks for the world immediately and in the next 10 years are dominated by the environment, with many issues tied to the climate crisis.

Final Key Safety Message

Both heat and cold injuries escalate quickly. Early recognition is essential to prevent severe outcomes.

REPORT ACCIDENTS, REPORT HEAT OR COLD INJURIES Heat injuries occur when the body can't cool itself effectively. They range from mild to life-threatening.

Cold injuries occur when the body loses heat much faster than it can produce it.



1 - [TUC useful link](#)