



Winter Covered: Practical Ways to Prepare for Seasonal Changes

With the leaves falling and nights drawing in, we're reminded that autumn has arrived and winter is just around the corner. Seasonal changes can present new risks - colder weather and shorter daylight hours mean there is more potential for accidents to happen and as such your risk assessment processes should include addressing seasonal and climatic conditions.

In preparation for the cold weather returning, we thought now is an ideal time to share some simple, practical advice on dealing with seasonal changes.

If you would like expert guidance or support on any of the issues detailed below, please contact our specialist teams – we're happy to help.

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Snow & Ice: Those in charge of sites have a duty to take reasonable care to ensure the safety of those on their properties. Some areas particularly prone to being affected by snow and ice include building entrances, car parks, pedestrian walkways and shortcuts, sloped areas and areas constantly in the shade or wet. It is important to identify outdoor areas used by pedestrians and vehicles; assess the risks; monitor weather forecasts and take action whenever freezing temperatures or snow are expected. Procedures should be in place to prevent slippery surfaces forming or to warn pedestrians and drivers of any such hazards. Redirect pedestrians to less slippery walkways and separate off existing ones with a barrier. The most common method used to de-ice surfaces is gritting, and gritting plans should be in place wherever your risk assessment has identified high risk areas. Assess the risks at your site from any icicles hanging over pavements, roads or parking areas, as these can also pose a threat to pedestrians and vehicles.

Slippery Surfaces: The accumulation of wet or decaying leaves on pathways can increase the chances of slips, as they cover any hazard that may be on the path and because they themselves create a slip risk. Ensure a procedure is in place for removing leaves at regular intervals. An additional source of slip hazards is algae or moss growth, which may not be a problem in summer, but can be when continually wet conditions prevail.

During wet weather, slip risks are also a particular hazard at entrances to buildings and shopping centres. A simple slip test can help review the slip resistance of flooring and ascertain what additional measures should be taken to prevent slip accidents.



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Freezing Water: It's that time of year when pipes and water from overflows freeze; drains become blocked and standing water can accumulate and freeze. Assess the risks at your site and take preventative action. Where units are vacant and background heating is not maintained, water systems should be drained down to prevent freezing and bursting. Water pipes exposed to external temperatures should be adequately lagged or fitted with trace heating.

Low Light: Low light conditions, even in the day, can present an increased security risk. Check lighting is functional and sufficient enough for those on your sites to see and avoid any hazards that might be on the ground.

Windy Weather: Winter weather is inclined to be windy so all loose items on roofs, facades, general external areas and susceptible trees need to be assessed to prevent them being turned into windblown debris.

Fire Risk: In colder weather, as smokers tend to congregate nearer to the buildings for shelter, so fire risk can increase. Check that all fire emergency exits, and the paths from them, are clear.

Liquids Stored Outside: Ensure any liquids stored outside are checked, as they may be affected by low temperatures. Assess how well they are protected, taking into account the added weight that snow and ice can put on roofs, shelters and canopies.

People in Commercial Waste Containers: In recent winters, an increasing number of deaths have occurred as a result of people sleeping in waste containers due to the cold conditions. Every year a number of people are killed through being accidentally crushed by waste collection compactors. This risk can be minimised by storing containers in a secure location, locking them and checking for signs of activity in the vicinity.

Temperatures in the Workplace: Covered by the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, the Approved Code of Practice L24 suggests a minimum temperature in workrooms of at least 16 degrees Celsius (or 13 degrees Celsius if much of the work indoors involves severe physical effort), although this is not an absolute legal requirement. 'Thermal comfort' - whether someone is feeling too hot or too cold - can be difficult to define. The employer's essential duty therefore is to determine 'reasonable comfort' - the thermal environment satisfying the majority of people (80% of people, according to the HSE) in the workplace.

Outdoor Working in Winter Weather: The HSE suggests introducing some simple administrative controls, for example: (1) ensure that any personal protective equipment issued is appropriate for these wintry conditions; (2) where practicable provide mobile facilities for warming up, and encourage the drinking of warm fluids such as soup or hot chocolate; (3) introduce more frequent rest breaks; (4) if at all possible, delay work until the weather improves; and (5) educate workers about recognising the early symptoms of cold stress.



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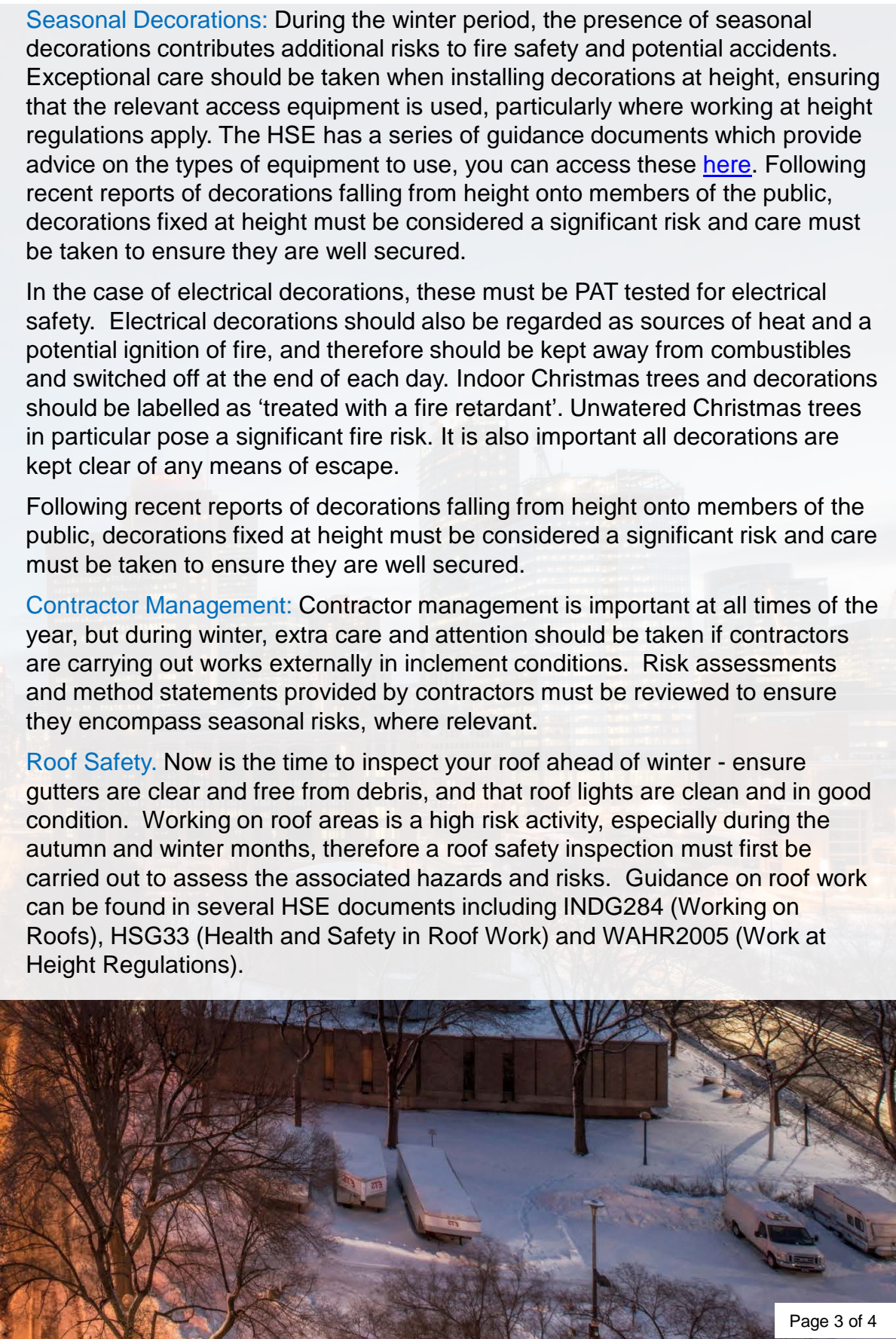
Seasonal Decorations: During the winter period, the presence of seasonal decorations contributes additional risks to fire safety and potential accidents. Exceptional care should be taken when installing decorations at height, ensuring that the relevant access equipment is used, particularly where working at height regulations apply. The HSE has a series of guidance documents which provide advice on the types of equipment to use, you can access these [here](#). Following recent reports of decorations falling from height onto members of the public, decorations fixed at height must be considered a significant risk and care must be taken to ensure they are well secured.

In the case of electrical decorations, these must be PAT tested for electrical safety. Electrical decorations should also be regarded as sources of heat and a potential ignition of fire, and therefore should be kept away from combustibles and switched off at the end of each day. Indoor Christmas trees and decorations should be labelled as 'treated with a fire retardant'. Unwatered Christmas trees in particular pose a significant fire risk. It is also important all decorations are kept clear of any means of escape.

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Contractor Management: Contractor management is important at all times of the year, but during winter, extra care and attention should be taken if contractors are carrying out works externally in inclement conditions. Risk assessments and method statements provided by contractors must be reviewed to ensure they encompass seasonal risks, where relevant.

Roof Safety. Now is the time to inspect your roof ahead of winter - ensure gutters are clear and free from debris, and that roof lights are clean and in good condition. Working on roof areas is a high risk activity, especially during the autumn and winter months, therefore a roof safety inspection must first be carried out to assess the associated hazards and risks. Guidance on roof work can be found in several HSE documents including INDG284 (Working on Roofs), HSG33 (Health and Safety in Roof Work) and WAHR2005 (Work at Height Regulations).





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Winter Cooling Tower Shutdown. In winter, there is no, or very low, demand for cooling in many buildings and cooling towers can remain idle increasing the risk of stagnation and microbiological growth. By shutting down cooling towers which are not required over the winter, significant water, energy and chemical cost savings can be achieved for building operators and tenants.

Following the right water treatment program shutdown procedure ensures your cooling tower is shut down correctly, helping to prevent the formation of iron chips and biofilm, protecting the cooling tower over the winter and providing for a smoother, trouble-free start-up the following spring. Click [here](#) to view a sample water treatment program shutdown procedure. All cooling towers differ, so it is advisable to seek professional help before undertaking any works relating to cooling tower systems.

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Intelligent Risk Management

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