



# Safety Alert

## Plant and machinery

## Cold storage facilities

Hazards exist for people who work in cold storage facilities – walk-in coldrooms and freezers – that can lead to serious injury or death. These hazards include:

- entrapment
- exposure to cold
- hazardous / oxygen deficient atmospheres
- working in isolation
- slips, trips and falls
- noise
- lack of lighting
- manual handling.

The temperature and duration of exposure to cold can result in workers sustaining frostbite and hypothermia, while extended exposure can lead to death.

Employers – or persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) – have a responsibility to prevent work-related injuries and fatalities from incidents in walk-in coldrooms and freezers by actively managing and reviewing their safety management systems.

### Control measures

Control measures include:

- reducing worker exposure to the cold, where possible – consider using upright or deep freezers instead of walk-in coldrooms
- reducing the time workers are in coldrooms – restrict to the shortest time period possible
- for periods of more than about 10 minutes, ensuring clothing suits the temperature and duration of activity and minimises skin exposure to the cold (e.g. thermal/fleece jumper, gloves, hat etc.)
- ensuring walk-in coldrooms' internal door opening mechanisms are in good working order and are regularly maintained and tested
- ensuring walk-in coldrooms have emergency alarm buttons fitted and regularly tested so that anyone trapped inside can send for help
- using slip-resistant floor surfaces to reduce slip hazards
- maintaining good housekeeping practices when stacking and storing items to remove trip hazards

- ensuring adequate lighting is provided for the tasks in the work space
- using a buddy system to provide an immediate support in the event of an emergency and avoiding people working in isolation
- having emergency response procedures in place with appropriate training and regular test drills
- having reliable communications systems in place that you test regularly
- assessing manual handling tasks and implementing systems to eliminate the risk of injury
- providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to suit the working conditions (e.g. footwear and clothing) and making sure workers wear it.

Mobile phones may not work within coldrooms so do not rely on them as a communications device unless they have been tested and regularly checked as working in that coldroom. Frozen batteries may also disable the device.

It is important that PCBUs induct and train workers and supervisors so they understand the hazards and risks of working in a cold environment, including the adverse effects of exposure to cold.

Thermal stress may increase fatigue and affect an individual's ability to work safely and without risk to their own safety of that of others.

Everyone should be trained in the workplace's safe work policies, procedures and practices, including emergency response. Training requirements should also be reviewed and updated when new items of plant are introduced or when personnel change.

As well as providing training, PCBUs must ensure appropriate supervision is provided for workers and visitors. The level of supervision required should take into consideration the hazards, level of exposure, integrity of control measures in place and workers' experience.

In workplaces where safe work procedures and worker training and instruction are the primary risk control measures, a greater level of supervision is required.

It is also recommended that PCBUs conduct regular health monitoring to ensure exposure to cold or rapid

changes in temperature do not have an adverse impact on the health and safety of their workers.

## Find out more

Our free work health and safety advisory service can visit your workplace to help you identify hazards and risks, and to put in place practical safety systems that will suit your specific circumstances. Our advisors have no inspector powers so you can feel comfortable inviting them in to help. Go to [safework.sa.gov.au/freeadvice](http://safework.sa.gov.au/freeadvice) or call **1300 365 255** to request a visit.

*Code of Practice – Managing the Work Environment and Facilities*

*Code of Practice – Managing Risks of Plant in the Workplace*

*Code of Practice – Hazardous Manual Tasks*

© Government of South Australia, 2017 | SA27-2 APR2017



This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Australia Licence v3.0. For terms see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/deeden>.

**Disclaimer** | While care has been taken to ensure the accuracy and currency of the information in this publication, at the time of reading it may not be sufficiently accurate, current or complete to suit your individual needs. Reliance on the information in this publication is at your own risk. SafeWork SA accepts no liability for any loss resulting from your reliance on it. To best meet your work health and safety obligations refer to current Acts, Regulations and Codes of Practice.