

WINTER WINDOW CLEANING

Winter months for window cleaners means very cold hands, freezing hoses, freezing water and many more hazards to contend with.

Planning is key | Assessing Hazards

Plan / Take action whenever freezing temperatures are forecast; its good to keep up to date by subscribing to weather service site such as the Met Office – MET office reports are available free and highlight adverse weather conditions.

Most winter related problems can be avoided with good preparation.

Equipment / Water-fed Pole System's

When water turns to ice it expands and that is why anything full of water is at risk of cracking or breaking when temperatures plummet. If the forecast is anywhere near zero degrees or below then prepare the evening before.

Prevention is the best cure. Take hose reels indoors and if you have a trolley system or backpack left in a van outside then bring it inside, bring your water-proofs in from the van to the warmth of your house / office / yard. De-pressurise water pumps. Insulating the van and, or the tank could prevent the tank and equipment (pumps) freezing overnight.

Consider where to install your RO unit at outset, as these are at particular risk in winter conditions. RO units have fragile membranes which can easily be damaged in freezing conditions. Some window cleaners have these units mounted directly in the van or even worse have a static system placed outdoors. If this is the case then you need to take measures to protect the unit from the cold to minimise the possibility of damage. Some people disconnect hoses from filters and pumps so any remaining water can expand. Quick release fittings would help with this.

At fitting stage it is also worthwhile keeping all hoses within van / not clipped to external underside of van, using rollers / guides instead. At end of each day ensure hoses are clear of water which may freeze during night, empty all water from tanks within van, and keep the van inside where possible.

Working – Reduce water spillage

Apart from equipment issues, freezing cold weather also poses problems whilst cleaning. An obvious danger exists cleaning externally in freezing temperatures with water falling onto ground and likely to freeze causing potential slip hazards for clients, members of public tenants etc. so the less water spillage the better in freezing conditions.

Here are some ideas on how to tackle this:

Take action before | during | after when freezing temperatures have been identified, to reduce the risk of slips on ice, frost or snow, ensure to assess the risk and put in a system to manage it.

Identify the areas affected by your window cleaning, use warning signage and where possible. Often we will be away from site long after hazard is still applicable so if warning signage / cones are used, ask site to remove them once the hazard has passed or they will eventually be ignored.

Can we divert pedestrians to less hazardous walkways, without endangering further with traffic?

Consider re-scheduling of some work | can it be undertaken at warmer times of the year without compromising on safety?

Look to reduce the amount of water impacting on walkways, if site is traditionally cleaned using a water fed pole system evaluate whether it is possible to use traditional methods which require much less use of water.

Can ladder be used more safely?

Pay particular attention to the landing area of ladder and assess risk of ladder slipping and also working at height. Another alternative is to use an extension pole.



Gritting | Salting

The other thing you can do is to give a generous spread of salt / grit on the areas of spillage. Give particular attention to areas that people are most likely to tread. Salt can stop ice forming and cause existing ice or snow to melt. It is most effective when it is ground down, but this will take far longer on pedestrian areas than on roads. Gritting should be carried out if window cleaning has affected entrances paths public highways when frost, ice or snow is forecast and the floor temperatures are at, or below freezing.

Avoid water freezing while you work

Often the biggest problem for window cleaners when temperatures drop below zero is the fact that water can often freeze on the glass or even in the pipes of the WFP system.

If a building is well heated on the inside then in most cases water is unlikely to freeze on the window. Avoid cleaning the windows of places which are unlikely to be well heated internally. It is not an unforeseen event where brushes stick / freezes to window!

When using water fed pole systems the water is left to dry on the window so there is more chance of the water freezing. In some cases it may be best to use traditional methods so that windows are left dry. Keep freezing surfaces to a minimum / reduce length of hoses being used were possible. If using traditional methods then you can use additives in the water to lower the freezing point of the water. Try mixing the water with methylated spirits, or screen wash to a mixture to give the product a lower freezing

PPE – Keep warm and dry

As Employers we have duties concerning the provision and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) at work. We have a general duty under section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work.

Outdoor working in cold conditions

When working outdoors the effects of the weather in the UK environment can potentially have a serious impact on an employee's health if the risks have not been considered or properly managed. Ensure all employees have the adequate personal protective equipment issued and is of a quality and appropriate standard to keep employees warm and dry. Use decent boots that don't let the water in. Snow boots or Wellington boots might not qualify you for the front cover of FHM but your feet will thank you for it. Have employees check soles of Workwear boots, to ensure of good grip. Choose warm waterproof gloves that keep your hands warm as well as dry. Golf Hand warmers are also great to have in pockets to re-heat hands, good thick winter socks. Most of your body heat escapes through your head so be sure to wear a hat and a snood.

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Keep Warm and Keep Safe this Winter

Ask Clients to provide facilities for warming up and encourage the drinking of warm fluids such as soup or hot drinks, introduce more frequent rest breaks. Educate workers about recognising the early symptoms of cold stress.

Be Seen

Always ensure to use High-Vis workwear. Take into account ambient and artificial lighting conditions while working and the effect of conditions such as fog and snow.

Check HSE website for some sample toolbox talks which may further help, ensure compliance. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. The Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 2002 and the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (as amended)

Finally be Realistic

Realistically you are not likely to cover as much of your work as you usually would but something is better than nothing. Give priority to your best work. Do you have work to do which is under cover or inside cleans? If you keep an eye on the forecasts then you can plan ahead to schedule these kind of jobs for when it is likely to snow or be extremely cold.

Company Vehicles

With winter approaching, a few minutes' maintenance could see your van through the worst the weather has to offer.

1. Get your vehicles serviced: If your van is due a service, get it done before the winter.

2. Check the battery: The battery should be the first priority. During the winter months it suffers from a double whammy of cold temperatures – reducing the output – and the increased use of lights, heater and blower, which place it under additional strain. Batteries have an effective life of around five years.

3. Top up engine coolant with antifreeze: Engine coolant should be a 50/50 mix of water and antifreeze. You will need to top it up with antifreeze as it becomes diluted over time. People make the mistake of topping up with water during the year, so the antifreeze gets over-diluted and freezes during very cold weather.

4. Check the condition of your tyres: As van's tyres are key to both steering and braking, it is essential they are in good condition. Check tyres for pressure and tread depth.

We recommend a minimum of 3mm depth during the winter, compared to the legal minimum of 1.6mm, as this gives better grip. You could also look at changing from summer to winter tyres, as these also offer increased grip in snow slush or ice.



5. Clean your lights: Check that all lights, indicators and rear reflectors are clean. Make sure there are no cracked lenses or blown bulbs.

And don't forget to check full beam headlights, fog lights and indicators.

6. Wash your windscreen and wipers: Give your windscreen a thorough clean inside and out and top up your screen washer fluid with antifreeze. Run your finger down the wiper blades to check for nicks and tears, check for any chips in the windscreen, as these can grow in the cold weather.

Also touch up any chips in the bodywork as the salt deposits on the road will attack these.

7. Prepare for longer journeys: Before setting off on a longer journey, check the weather forecast, travel news and safest routes. Also, Allow extra journey time to avoid having to rush.

Clear all windows of snow and ice using a scraper and de-icer, and ensure you have antifreeze in your car. Read our guide to driving safely in the dark.

8. Carry a winter car breakdown kit: This should include a shovel, torch, blanket, hi-visibility vest, screen wash, food and drink supplies, scraper and de-icer, and snow grips for your shoes in case you need to walk to safety.

And don't forget a fully charged mobile phone. Drive according to the road and weather conditions.

9. Check your cover: Comprehensive breakdown cover is crucial at this time of year and will give you the peace of mind of knowing you won't end up stranded in the cold. So check your policy and remember to take a contact phone number with you on all journeys.

10. Other important areas: Also, keep at least a quarter of a tank of fuel in case of unexpected delay and check the oil.

If you have a bit of motor know-how, check your brake pads, brake discs and brake fluid to ensure the brakes are fast and responsive. Ensure the fan belt and alternator drive belts are tight and not worn and that plugs and other leads are in good condition and secure.

If you don't feel confident making these checks, any garage should be able to help.

www.confused.com/on-the-road/safety/winter-driving-fails