

Outdoor Safety



Your work at Northwestern may require working outdoors, which presents constantly changing conditions that may pose many hazards, such as inclement weather, animals and insects, poor lighting, ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun, heat and cold stress, and vehicular traffic. It's important that you are aware of these potential hazards and the procedures to avoid them to ensure your safety and the safety of your colleagues. Below are a few helpful tips to work safely outdoors:

Weather: Check local forecasts and avoid working outdoors in inclement weather (e.g., storms).

Insects: Avoid wearing colognes and perfumes and using scented soaps, lotions, shampoos, and deodorants since they may attract stinging insects.

Lighting: In dark conditions, ensure adequate work site lighting is established prior to starting work.

Sunburn: Apply sunscreen and wear protective clothing such as long sleeves and a hat to avoid sunburns.

Heat Stress: Take frequent breaks in cool areas and stay hydrated. If possible, work in cooler parts of the day (e.g., morning) to avoid heat-related illnesses.

Cold Stress: Take frequent breaks in warm, dry areas, stay hydrated, and dress appropriately (e.g., jacket, gloves, hat, and insulated footwear) to avoid cold-related illnesses, such as frostbite.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant to your work. Work with your team to review potential outdoor hazards in your work area and discuss the required procedures for the work tasks.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Community safety

Outdoor utility work, landscaping activities, and operating vehicles and equipment may present hazards to Northwestern community members. Plan your outdoor work ahead of time and employ the following safety measures:

- ✓ Inspect work areas for hazards before starting work
- ✓ Use barricades, caution tape, and/or flaggers to prevent unauthorized entry into work areas
- ✓ Redirect vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic to avoid work areas
- ✓ If possible, avoid working during times of heavy vehicle and pedestrian traffic
- ✓ When working near roadways, wear high visibility clothing (e.g., work vest) so motorists can see you
- ✓ When operating machinery or vehicles, check surrounding areas and travel paths for pedestrians and obstructions before moving, and use flaggers when necessary
- ✓ Contact [JULIE](#) by dialing 811 or (800) 892-0123 before trenching or excavating activities to avoid hazards associated with underground utilities, such as electricity and natural gas

Learn more: Review the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) [website](#) on Hazards to Outdoor Workers.

Report all injuries: [Online](#) or call (847) 491-5582.

Safety at Home

Use the same workplace safe practices at home to keep you, your family, and your pets safe. Additional tips to stay safe when working outdoors include:

Lawnmowers: Avoid the risk of fire by not refueling when the engine is hot. Survey the lawn before mowing to remove items (e.g., rocks, branches, toys) that may become dangerous flying objects. Follow all warning labels, such as ensuring guards are in place and wearing appropriate PPE, such as safety glasses, protective footwear, and hearing protection.

Portable ladders: Follow safe work [practices](#) to ensure ladders are selected, inspected, and used correctly.

Fire extinguishers: Have an ABC-type fire extinguisher in an accessible location (e.g., kitchen or garage) and inspect it monthly for readiness.

For Additional Information Contact Environmental Health and Safety at ehs@northwestern.edu.

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Environmental Health and Safety for details.