

Be prepared for the winter weather

The winter months are always a concern to businesses particularly when roads and pathways become hazardous. We thought it would be helpful if we shared our experience of claims we have faced and the practical tips for protecting your nursery.

Over a number of years we have managed claims relating to either employees or parents slipping on icy paths. Everyone is aware that poor weather conditions will arrive at some stage in the year therefore a nursery has a duty to assess this foreseeable risk. Accidents are not always avoidable but the insurers decision regarding whether the nursery is liable revolves around the quality of documentation available after the event.

As always, it is best to prepare policies and procedures in advance which include completion of risk assessments. Areas to consider are:

- Snow and ice can descend unexpectedly overnight and you need to have decided what must happen when the first person arrives on site. Pathways can be gritted if it is safe to do so but a procedure must be in place that everyone understands. Sometimes, it is impractical to remove snow and ice from every path and road, so identify and address the essential routes. These need to be communicated to visitors and staff by way of signs and barriers.
- Internal areas can also become slippery as ice and snow are walked into the building. Non-slip mats and parental provision of indoor and outdoor footwear for the children offer solutions to you. However, if pools of water form then these need to be cordoned off or removed at regular intervals.
- The outdoor play areas need to be assessed on a daily basis to take into account the change in weather conditions.
- Staff must be advised to wear suitable footwear and although this may seem obvious, we can assure you that claims have been won or lost because of the type of shoes an employee decided to wear.

Inside the building can be an issue too. Sometimes heating fails to work or can be inadequate, so if you need to use additional heaters remember they carry risks of injury or fire. Fire risks can be managed by making sure that portable heaters are never switched on and then left unattended whilst the nursery is closed. Care must be taken to ensure that no radiator or exposed pipework with a surface temperature exceeding 43°C can be touched by a child. Don't forget you need to complete risk assessments regarding any temporary changes.

Heating pipes can freeze during periods of falling temperatures. In this situation, problems occur during the thaw when the damaged pipes burst allowing water to escape. Although the insulation of your pipes will help protect them, programming your heating to automatically turn on if the temperature falls too much is sensible precaution. Another option is to leave the heating on at a constant low temperature whilst the nursery is closed.

Empty properties are especially vulnerable to damage so before you close for your Christmas break, make sure all your keyholders are aware of what to do in the event of an emergency. Staff should know the location of the stoptap and fuse boxes as well as all relevant telephone numbers. If a water leak occurs don't forget to check the electrics have not been damaged.

In closing, winter brings a variety of seasonal hazards but by being prepared you can help protect your nursery.



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