

## 'Winterize' Dairy Facilities, Equipment, Employees

By Keith Engel, GEA Farm Technologies dairy farm hygiene and supplies specialist

Inevitably, winter delivers a variety of blows – from wind to ice to short daylight hours to snow – to dairy operations. While these challenges can't be stopped, dairy producers can "build their arsenal" and be prepared for winter's battles. Following are 13 tips to prepare your milking parlor for Old Man Winter.

1. **Evaluate vacuum and take-off settings** — Take steps to ensure optimal take-off and vacuum settings to ensure teat health. Match vacuum settings and pulsation to the liner.
2. **Protect parlor entrance and exit areas** — Take steps to eliminate ice and frozen manure, by protecting areas where cows walk.
3. **Use a winter teat dip** — To protect, heal and soften teat skin, use a post-dip with a high emollient level. A good winter teat dip includes an effective germicide proven to kill mastitis-causing bacteria and increase blood circulation.
4. **Protect employees** — Make sure your milking technicians wear proper gear, such as milking sleeves and gloves, to protect themselves from winter's harsh elements. Provide a proper heat source in the milking parlor that ensures employee comfort. Uncomfortable employees tend to be less effective and less reliable.
5. **Warm drop hoses** — Warm water in drop hoses fosters a clean milking parlor and clean milking units. Also, injecting sanitizer in drop hoses can help keep milking units and milking gloves clean and sanitized.
6. **Eliminate leaks** — By eliminating leaks from water hoses, you eliminate the possibility of ice building up in and around the milking parlor.
7. **Warm the supply room** — In rooms used to store teat dips and blending systems, the temperature should be by more than 50° F. (10 C.). If the supply room has an overhead door, make sure it stays closed (except when entering or exiting) to prevent hygiene products from freezing.
8. **Maintain traction** — Flooring should provide proper traction to prevent cows from slipping and/or falling. It may be necessary to spread lime or sand in cow traffic areas to ensure traction.
9. **Cautiously warm treatments** — Work with your veterinarian to establish a best practice for warming mastitis treatment tubes prior to use. If warm water surrounds the tube, your cows may run the risk of a prototheca mastitis infection.
10. **Rethink warming post-dip** — If you warm teat dippers in a bucket of hot water, make sure water does not mix with the teat dip. This practice may increase the risk of mastitis-causing pathogens spreading and reducing teat dip effectiveness.
11. **Take hot water temperatures** — Verify that you have adequate hot water. The water-draining temperature from a clean-in-place system should be 120° F. (49 C.) or greater. In cold weather, water heaters may run 10° F. less than during other seasons.
12. **Adjust schedules** — If inclement weather is expected (or has arrived), ask employees to arrive early for their shifts. In challenging weather conditions, routine tasks often take longer. Plus, they should allow extra travel time to get to work.
13. **Develop a contingency plan for extreme winter conditions** — Determine who will milk the cows if some employees are unable to get to work. Or, consider alternate transportation means, such as snowmobiles or large tractors or trucks, to get employees to the dairy.



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