Concrete Technology in Focus
Successful Cold Weather Concreting

Introduction
Cold weather can lead to many problems in mixing, placing, and curing of concrete that can have an adverse effect on its properties and service life. This guide has been developed by BASF to assist the entire construction team (owners, specifiers, contractors, and ready-mixed concrete producers) in the design, manufacture, delivery, placement, and curing of quality concrete in cold weather.

Table 1: Setting Time of Concrete at Various Temperatures
(Source: "Concrete Construction", March, 1990)

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American Concrete Institute (ACI) Committee 306 defines cold weather as "when air temperature has fallen to, or is expected to fall below, 40 °F (4 °C) during the protection period; protection period is defined as the time required to prevent concrete from being affected by exposure to cold weather."

Successful Cold Weather Concreting

Setting time of concrete as shown in Table 1 is increased approximately one-third for each 10 °F (5 °C) reduction in temperature. Low temperatures slow down the hydration process and significantly retard concrete setting time, which results in reduced compressive strength at early ages, and increased strength at later ages (see Figure 1).

If all precautions and recommended ACI concrete practices are followed, successful cold weather concreting can be achieved.

- avoid placing concrete on frozen subgrade
- prevent concrete from freezing
- limit rapid concrete temperature changes

More Information
The Master Builders Solutions brand brings all of BASF’s expertise together to create chemical solutions for new construction, maintenance, repair and renovation of structures. Master Builders Solutions is built on the experience gained from more than a century in the construction industry.

The know-how and experience of a global community of BASF-construction experts form the core of Master Builders Solutions. We combine the right elements from our portfolio to solve your specific construction challenges. We collaborate across areas of expertise and regions and draw on the experience gained from countless construction projects worldwide. We leverage global BASF technologies, as well as our in-depth knowledge of local building needs, to develop innovations that help make you more successful and drive sustainable construction.

The comprehensive portfolio under the Master Builders Solutions brand encompasses concrete admixtures, cement additives, chemical solutions for underground construction, waterproofing solutions, sealants, concrete repair & protection solutions, performance grouts, performance flooring solutions.

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This information and all further technical advice are based on BASF’s present knowledge and experience. However, BASF reserves the right to make any changes according to technological progress or further developments.
There are established cold weather concrete practices that will ensure satisfactory concrete performance. The objectives of these practices are to:  
• maintain curing conditions that foster normal strength development  
• assure that the concrete develops the required strength for safe removal of forms  
• prevent damage to concrete due to freezing at early ages  
• keep the concrete’s temperature changes to withstand induced thermal stresses  
• provide protection with the intended serviceability of the structure

Concrete Temperature Control

During cold weather, the concrete mixing temperature should be controlled so that when the concrete is placed, its temperature is not below the values shown in Table 2 for normal weight concrete.

Concrete Materials

The temperature of concrete at the time of mixing should always be near the minimum temperatures given in Table 2. Placement temperatures should not be higher than these minimum values by more than 20 °F (11 °C).

High concrete temperatures do not offer significantly longer protection time against freezing because heat loss is more rapid when concrete temperatures are higher than ambient temperatures. High concrete temperatures require more mixing water to attain a given slump, increase the rate of slump loss and thermal shrinkage, as well as the possibility of plastic shrinkage cracking, because moisture loss through evaporation is greater.

Concrete temperature at the time of mixing is influenced by temperature, specific heat and quantity of its ingredients. The approximate temperature of concrete can be calculated from the following equation:

\[ T = \frac{2.22(M_c + M_\text{ag} + M_\text{w})}{0.22(M_c + M_\text{ag} + M_\text{w})} \]

where:

- \( T \) = final temperature of the concrete mixture
- \( M_c \), \( M_\text{ag} \), and \( M_\text{w} \) = mass of cement, saturated surface-dry aggregate, fine aggregate respectively

The temperature of concrete can be increased by 1 °F (0.5 °C) by increasing:

- cement temperature by 8 °F (4 °C)
- water temperature by 4 °F (2 °C)
- aggregate temperature by 2 °F (1 °C)

Of all the concrete-making materials, water is the easiest and most practical to heat. The mass of aggregates and cement in a concrete mixture is much greater than the mass of water. However, water can store five times as much heat as can solid materials of the same mass.

Concrete Materials

The use of faster setting cements may improve the rate of hardening of concrete in cold weather. A 10 to 15 °F (5 to 8 °C) temperature rise per 100 lb (45 kg) of cement occurs from cement hydration. The temperature increase from cement hydration is directly proportional to the cement content of the concrete.

Type III (high-early strength) cement can be used to develop higher ultimate strength and greater durability than cement placed at higher temperatures. It is subject to less thermal stresses and curing difficulties than Type I cement, and is more economical than Type II cement. Type III cement offers faster early strength, and increased early strength performance. In sub-freezing weather, Type III cement should not be used in temperatures equal to, or below, 3°F (–1°C).

The requirements for good results in placing and curing concrete in cold weather are not different from that for other seasons. Concrete must be placed where it is to remain and in shallow layers to allow adequate vibration; use wind breaks, cure and protect freshly-placed concrete from moisture loss and freezing.

Chemical Admixtures

Chemical admixtures conforming to ASTM C 494/C 494M Types C, accelerating, and E, water-reducing and accelerating, are beneficial for concrete placed during cold weather. Benefits obtained from these admixtures include:

- lower water demand – by a minimum of 5%  
- improved workability during placing  
- faster rate of setting (see Figure 3)  
- increased early compressive strength  
- earlier stripping and reuse of forms

Figure 2. Effect of Freezing on 28-Day Compressive Strength of Concrete  
In sub-freezing weather conditions, setting time, strength development and durability characteristics of concrete that is not adequately protected will be severely affected. For example, concrete:

- should not have water-cementitious materials ratio exceeding the recommendations in ACI 201.2R, “Guide to Durable Concrete”
- exposed to cycles of freezing and thawing while in a saturated condition or in service, should be properly air-entrained (see ACI 201.2R)
- in the plastic state will freeze when the mix temperature falls below 32 °F (0 °C), and is left undisturbed for sufficient time for ice to form. Once ice has formed, normal hydration will not occur and concrete setting time will be seriously impaired
- has frozen during the first 24 hours can experience up to 50% water content and aggregate temperatures are higher than ambient temperatures. High concrete temperatures require more mixing water to attain a given slump, increase the rate of slump loss and thermal shrinkage, as well as the possibility of plastic shrinkage cracking, because moisture loss through evaporation is greater
- the temperature of concrete at the time of placement should always be near the minimum temperatures given in Table 2. Placement temperatures should not be higher than these minimum values by more than 20 °F (11 °C)
- high concrete temperatures, even during the first 24 hours, can experience up to 50% water content and aggregate temperatures are higher than ambient temperatures. High concrete temperatures require more mixing water to attain a given slump, increase the rate of slump loss and thermal shrinkage, as well as the possibility of plastic shrinkage cracking, because moisture loss through evaporation is greater

Concrete temperature at the time of mixing is influenced by temperature, specific heat and quantity of its ingredients. The approximate temperature of concrete can be calculated from the following equation:

$$ T = \frac{(M_c + M_a + M_{wa} + M_{ws} + M_{wc})}{0.22(M_c + M_a + M_{wa} + M_{ws} + M_{wc})} $$

where:

- \( T \) = final temperature of the concrete mixture
- \( T_a \) = temperature of cement, fine aggregate, coarse aggregate and water, respectively
- \( M_c \) = mass of cement, \( M_a \) = mass of sand, \( M_{wa} \) = mass of coarse aggregate, \( M_{ws} \) = mass of water in fine aggregate, \( M_{wc} \) = mass of water in coarse aggregate, respectively

The temperature of concrete can be increased by 1 °F (0.5 °C) by increasing:

- cement temperature by 8 °F (4 °C)
- water temperature by 4 °F (2 °C)
- aggregate temperature by 2 °F (1 °C)

Of all the concrete-making materials, water is the easiest and most practical to heat. The mass of aggregates and cement in a concrete mixture is smaller compared to the mass of water. However, water can store five times as much heat as can solid materials of the same mass.

Concrete Materials

The use of faster setting cements may improve the rate of hardening of concrete in cold weather. A 10 to 15 °F (5 to 8 °C) temperature increase per 100 lb (45 kg) of cement occurs from cement hydration. The temperature increase from cement hydration is directly proportional to the cement content of the concrete.

Type III (high-early strength) cement can be used to achieve faster setting time and higher early strength. The principal advantages from Type III cement occur during the first 7 days. Fly ash and other pozzolans and slag cement are used as partial replacements for portland cement. These materials can be used in conjunction with accelerating admixtures to obtain desired concrete performance in cold weather concreting.

The requirements for good results in placing and curing concrete in cold weather are not different from that for other seasons. Concrete should be placed where it is to remain and in shallow layers to allow adequate vibration; use wind breaks, cure and protect freshly-placed concrete from moisture loss and freezing.

Chemical Admixtures

Chemical admixtures conforming to ASTM C 494/C 494M Types C, accelerating, and E, water-reducing and accelerating, are beneficial for concrete placed during cold weather. Benefits obtained from these admixtures include:

- lower water demand – by a minimum of 5%
- improved workability during placing
- faster rate of setting (see Figure 6)
- increased early compressive strength
- earlier stripping and reuse of forms

Table 3: Typical Performance Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>ASTM C 694/C 494M</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Dosage (lb/ft³)</th>
<th>Setting Time (min)</th>
<th>Acceleration vs. No Admixture</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MasterSet AC 122</td>
<td>C &amp; E</td>
<td>16 (1.040)</td>
<td>32 (2.080)</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MasterSet FP 20</td>
<td>C &amp; E</td>
<td>10 (0.650)</td>
<td>20 (1.300)</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MasterSet AC 534</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3 (0.360)</td>
<td>20 (1.440)</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>4.43</td>
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MasterSet AC 122 is a chloride-based water-reducing and accelerating admixture. MasterSet FP 20 is a non-chloride water-reducing and accelerating admixture. MasterSet AC 534 is a non-chloride accelerating admixture.

Control of Plastic Shrinkage Cracking

MasterFlex® microsynthetic fibers reduce the formation of plastic shrinkage cracks and plastic settlement. In addition, these fibers:

- hold cracks together
- reinforce against abrasion
- are compatible with all surface treatments
- will not change the required mixture proportions

Curing

Curing is the maintenance of satisfactory moisture content and temperature in concrete during its early stages so that desired properties may develop (see Figure 4). The minimum recommended curing period is 7 days. Inadequate curing can cause plastic shrinkage cracking and impair strength development and durability.

Freshly-placed concrete in cold weather must be protected from drying so that adequate hydration can occur. Normally, measures must be taken to prevent evaporation of moisture from concrete.

Methods of curing include the use of:

- impervious paper and plastic sheets
- membrane-forming curing compounds

Note: Water curing is not recommended in freezing weather.

Figure 4. Effect of Curing on Compressive Strength of Concrete

(Source: ACI 306 R, "Guide to Cold Weather Concreting")

Summary

Cold weather concrete difficulties are chiefly caused by low ambient temperatures, which increase the rate of slump loss and thermal shrinkage, as well as the possibility of plastic shrinkage cracking, because moisture loss through evaporation is greater.
temperatures, and by not protecting concrete from freezing. These conditions adversely affect the quality of concrete since the rate of setting is extended, early strength development is reduced and the potential for plastic shrinkage cracking may be increased.

Desired setting time, strength, durability and other properties of concrete can be obtained in cold weather by adhering to the following recommended practices:

• plan ahead for cold weather concrete placements
• use warm concrete ingredients and accelerating admixtures
• avoid placing concrete on frozen subgrade
• prevent concrete from freezing
• limit rapid concrete temperature changes

If all precautions and recommended ACI concreting practices are followed, successful cold weather concreting can be achieved.

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The beneficial impact that low temperatures can have on hardened concrete properties is recognized by ACI Committee 306, and in ACI 306R, “Guide to Cold Weather Concreting,” it is stated that: “Take advantage of the opportunity provided by cold weather to place low-temperature concrete. Concrete placed at lower temperatures [40 to 55 °F (5 to 13 °C)], protected against freezing, and properly cured for a sufficient length of time, has the potential to fall below, 40 °F (4 °C) during the protection period; protection period is defined as the time required to prevent concrete from being affected by exposure to cold weather.”

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