



HOT WEATHER WORK POLICY

As we enter into the summer months the higher temperatures bring with it the danger of suffering heat-related illnesses at our construction sites. Our workers are at high risk for heat-related illnesses due to the strenuous nature of their jobs and prolonged exposure to the heat and humidity brought on during the summer months.

Hydrate

You should be drinking water or other fluids every 15 – 20 minutes. Cool water should be your main source of hydration. Sports drinks (i.e., Gatorade, Powerade, etc.) and coconut water are also good for restoring electrolytes. Fresh fruits and juices are also a good option.

Beverages to avoid include coffee, sodas, and alcohol which contain diuretics and will cause you to become dehydrated. Some of the symptoms of dehydration include increased thirst, dry mouth, and swollen tongue, inability to sweat, weakness, dizziness, and decreased urine output. If you experience any of these symptoms you should immediately take a break and rehydrate.

Get Acclimated

This applies mainly to new workers and to workers who have been out of work due to illness or vacation for several days. To acclimatize, you should start doing about 50% of your normal workload and gradually work up to 100% over the next 5 to 7 days so your body can adjust to the heat and strenuous activity.

Dress Correctly

Light-colored, loose-fitting, and lightweight clothing is the way to go. Natural fiber clothing such as cotton is always a good choice because it's breathable and absorbs moisture well. Moisture-wicking clothing is also a smart option because it draws the sweat off your body. This allows your body to cool quicker which is helpful in more humid climates where sweat evaporation becomes more difficult.

Amended Start Times

The air temperature usually peaks between 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm. The earlier you start your day, the better off you'll be. This is especially true if you can finish up or spend a limited time working before the onset of the hottest hours of the day. However, any amendment to working hours must be approved by the client and be in compliance with the local by-laws.

Sunscreen

Whenever you are working outdoors you should be using sunscreen. Even on cloudy and overcast days, ultraviolet (UV) rays can reach you and cause sunburn. When working outside you should reapply often with a broad-spectrum sunscreen that contains zinc oxide, titanium dioxide, and/or avobenzone. Try to find a sunscreen that is either sweat-proof or waterproof to help ensure that you don't sweat it all off in the first few minutes of work. It's also a good idea to wear a wide-brimmed hat to block the sun's deadly rays.

Keep Cool

Helping your body maintain a stable internal temperature is vital in avoiding heat-related illness. Once the air temperature gets near or above normal body temperature the blood circulated to your skin can't lose heat. This causes you to sweat, but that's not enough to cool your body if the humidity won't allow the sweat to evaporate.

To cool your body temperature down, try getting inside an air-conditioned space like a vehicle or jobsite trailer. You can also apply a cool, wet cloth to pulse points on your body such as the neck, wrists, and elbows. The tops of your feet and inside of your ankles are also pulse points so try soaking them in a bucket of cool water for a few minutes. (We suggest taking your shoes and socks off first.)

If you are working indoors with no air conditioning, consider setting up some portable fans to increase air circulation and cool you off. There are also several personal cooling devices on the market like cooling vests or neck coolers that can help you beat the heat.

Heat Index

Employers and workers should always be aware of the heat index. The heat index combines air temperature and relative humidity to determine the apparent temperature. Apparent temperature is what it actually feels like outside. If the humidity is too high, it inhibits sweat from evaporating which reduces the body's ability to cool itself. Very low humidity increases sweat evaporation which can lead to dehydration.

Signs of Heat Stress

Heat stress, heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke are all heat-related illnesses that can occur at the construction site. Signs include heavy sweating, cold, pale clammy skin, fast weak pulse, nausea or vomiting, muscle cramps, tiredness, dizziness, and headaches. Symptoms can arise quickly so it's also important to train your workers, so they also monitor themselves and their coworkers and empower them to notify a supervisor and take the appropriate steps if they feel they or a coworker is becoming ill.

Thousands of workers every year are affected by heat-related illnesses every year. Heatstroke can cause major damage to your organs including your heart, liver, and kidney. It can also cause damage to muscles, blood disorders, and death. Heat exhaustion can cause workers to be less alert which can result in other construction-related injuries. By taking the above precautions most heat-related illnesses can be prevented or caught in enough time to treat and avoid serious injury or death.

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