



Working in Hot Conditions

Down the ages and around the globe, mankind has had to adapt to changing environments and extremes of both temperature and humidity - from pole to pole and desert to rain forest. So the human body has developed its own regulating system to handle these extremes. The hot weather in July can have a debilitating effect on your employees who work outside or in hot environments. These hot conditions can be hazardous to their safety and health. Those hot, humid summer workdays are more than an uncomfortable annoyance - they can cause heat stress, which can be life threatening if proper precautions are not taken.

Heat stress is an ever-present danger, not only for outdoor workers, but also for those working indoors in hot environments. Sweating is one way the body uses to maintain a stable temperature in the face of heat and is only effective if the humidity level is low enough to permit evaporation and if the fluids and salts that are lost are adequately replaced. If the body cannot dispose of excess heat, it will begin to store it. When this happens, the body's core temperature rises and the heart rate increases. An overheated person will begin to lose concentration, become irritable, and may even lose the desire to drink. The next step is fainting and then possibly death if the individual is not cooled down.

Dangerous Heat Disorders

Here is what you should know about the more dangerous symptoms of heat stress and the actions to take:

Sunburns or Sunstrokes - can occur from getting too much sun when you are not used to it. Even worse, too much exposure to these conditions can put so much strain on your heart and blood vessels that you risk heart failure or stroke. The risk is greatest for people who have heart or circulatory problems. Their bodies are least able to take the strain and may not perspire and cool properly. If you are

Heat Rash - A reaction to the heat may take the form of a heat rash. It isn't life-threatening, but it isn't pleasant either, and it is a sign that the weather is affecting you.

Actions to Take - A shower after each work shift should help, along with a sprinkling of talcum powder or corn starch. Lotions that block pores contribute to prickly heat, as do synthetic fabrics.

Heat Cramps - Are another sign of heat sickness.

Symptoms - They are painful muscle spasms in the arms, legs, or intestines, caused by losing salt while sweating. This painful condition indicates that you have been drinking lots of water, but you haven't replaced the salts lost.

Actions to Take - Drinking electrolyte solutions should help. Don't massage the cramping area. Surprisingly, such foods as strawberries, celery, and olives contain high amounts of sodium—the important part of salt—and they are great foods for this time of year.

Note: Experts no longer recommend using salt tablets to treat heat cramps.

Heat Exhaustion - Is a common response to working in summer weather.

Symptoms - You may feel dizzy, weak, or have chills, with clammy skin and profuse sweating. You may have a headache or feel sick to your stomach.

Actions to Take - Stop working! Move to a cool spot, and lie down or rest with feet slightly elevated. Drinking liquids will help. Heat exhaustion, unlike heat stress, is fairly serious and you should try to go at a slower pace for a couple of days.

Heat Stress - Is a common reaction to high temperatures. Our circulatory system plays a vital role in maintaining safe body temperature, because it carries the heat from deep inside the body to the outer shell - the skin - where the heat is dissipated by evaporation. People with high blood pressure may be more prone to heat stress, as may those who have been drinking alcohol or are obese, "out of condition," dehydrated, or unused to hard labor in the particular environment.

Symptoms: Thirst, tiredness, dizziness, even trouble seeing, headache, excessive sweating, chest pain, breathing problems, great weakness, diarrhea, cramps, nausea, rapid heartbeat, and dizziness are all indications of heat stress.

Actions to Take: Take a break in areas cooler than the work area and drink some water or fruit juice to replace lost body fluids. This will assist the normal body process of sweating. Pace yourself when first exposed to high external temperatures, to give the regulating system a chance to work properly.

Heat Stroke - Is the most serious type of heat sickness. You should pay attention to signs of heat illness so that your reaction to the heat will never get to this stage, because it is life threatening.

Symptoms: Rapid pulse, hot, dry skin with no sweating, mental confusion, poor coordination, delirium, convulsions or coma. The body temperature is 106 degrees F or higher.

Actions to Take: Move the affected person to a cool place at once. Sponge the person with cold water, apply ice packs or cold soft-drink cans, or immerse the person in cold water. Don't stop until help arrives. If the person is conscious, bring them water. Victims of heat stroke will die if not treated promptly. Seek medical help, move victim to a cool area, and soak the clothing in cool water. Vigorously fan the victim until help arrives.

Note: Heat stroke can result in death and requires immediate medical attention is needed.

Skin cancer - Is the result of too much sun.

See a doctor if you notice a mole or skin spot with these characteristics:

- One half is different from the other
- There are different colors or if the border is irregular
- It seems to be growing