

Don't let the HEAT STRESS you out.

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Whether you're planning outdoor activities or counting down the days until your kids are back in school, there is one thing that all of us should keep in mind this during time of year and that's keeping safe while we're outside. We all need to be aware of the risk that is associated with working out in the elements of the summer season. High heat and humidity, lack of hydration, and heavy and dark colored clothing can take some part in creating a dangerous work exposure. While heat stress related illnesses may not make the headlines every day, it is a common and potentially deadly topic that needs to be addressed.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) heat related illnesses include heat stroke, heat cramps, heat syncope, and heat rash. The following information was provided by the CDC and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to help prevent these illnesses from occurring.

Heat Stroke occurs when the body is unable to cool itself, this will result in the body temperature rising rapidly (as high at 106 degrees Fahrenheit or higher) within 10 -15 minutes.

Symptoms include:

- hot, dry skin
- hallucinations
- chills
- throbbing headache
- slurred speech

If this happens, 911 should be called and the employee's supervisor should be notified. The sick worker should be moved to a cool location and attempt to be cooled by soaking their clothes with water, sponging them with water and fanning their body.

Heat Cramps occur as a result of not keeping hydrated. Water and salt levels in the body, specifically the muscles, become too low and results in painful cramps or spasms usually in the abdomen, arms or legs. Heat cramps may be a result of heat exhaustion.

If heat cramps are suspected, the worker should cease all activity and move to a cool, sheltered area. He should drink cool water, a sports beverage or juice. Salt tablets should be avoided. Strenuous activity should also be avoided for several hours after the cramps subside.

Heat Syncope occurs when fainting (syncope) or dizziness happens as a result of prolonged standing or sudden rising from a sitting or lying position and may be a result of dehydration or lack of adaptation to a hot environment.

Symptoms of heat syncope include:

- Fainting
- Dizziness
- Light-headedness

Workers should sit or lie down in a cool place when they begin to notice symptoms. Also, they should hydrate with water, a clear juice or a sports beverage.

Heat Rash is the result of irritated skin due to excessive sweating and being exposed to hot and humid weather.

Symptoms of heat rash include:

- Red cluster pimple-like bumps or small blisters on the skin
- These are typically found on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts, and in elbow creases.

When dealing with heat rash, keep the affected area dry, consider using dusting powder which may increase comfort, and try to work in a less humid environment when possible.

It is important to note that workers who are over the age of 65, who are overweight, or who have heart conditions are at a higher risk of suffering from heat-related illnesses. Employers should take special note of the weather and work environment before sending workers into extreme conditions. Also, it is important to have alternate job tasks or backup plans in mind when weather conditions are at an extreme. Examples include alternating workers to reduce the exposure time in the heat, providing cool down breaks with hydrating beverages in cooler and shaded areas, or providing heat stress training to keep employees cautious.

Workers should wear light-colored clothing that is loose fitting and breathable (such as cotton); as well as avoiding drinks with caffeine, alcohol and large amounts of sugar. Workers should also be aware that personal protective equipment (PPE) may increase the risk of heat stress.

Another great recourse for training can be found at: <http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3154.pdf>. This OSHA Quick Card is a great handout that can be passed out for tool box talks or placed in locations where it can be easily referenced such as a locker rooms or work trucks.

Resources:

1. "Heat Stress", CDC – *Heat Stress – NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic*, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress>, 3 Feb.2011.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Protecting Yourself from Heat Stress", *NIOSH Fast Facts*, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2010-114, www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/outdoor/ , 3 Feb. 2011.