

Risks Associated with Working in Warm Weather

With summer quickly approaching, it is time to reflect upon safety practices and environmental circumstances that can increase the likelihood of heat stress. With warmer temperatures, we have to be aware of the associated risks when performing any variety of prolonged or strenuous activities.

When planning activities for employees, or preparing to undertake a task yourself, you must consider a number of factors that are related to the task. There are environmental factors, job situational factors, personal protective equipment factors, physical health conditions and exertion factors that all have to be considered. Each activity has its own hazards that must be evaluated. It is also important to note the proper intake of cool fluids is necessary.

The job environment may be the most significant factor when looking at heat stress. One must consider how the temperature will affect the work. Is the work being performed in an area that has low or no air movement? Are there factors in the immediate area that can cause the temperature to elevate significantly higher? By making sure the work area is well ventilated with fresh air, the risk can be reduced.

Job situational factors may include things such as heat generating equipment and the intensity of the energy required to complete a task. When thinking of situational factors, one must look at ways to reduce these risks. Shielding may be required to protect from heat generating sources, such as boilers or motors. One also must consider how much energy is required to perform the task. Longer task duration requires more breaks and longer breaks.

An individual's physical condition is another key factor in completing work. Each individual's body type and health circumstances are different, and must be considered when evaluating work that could result in heat stress. Every individual must know their limitations and address each task accordingly.

Recognizing the amount of exertion, additional heat sources, one's own physical limitations, and environmental factors are something everyone should consider, especially during the summer months, prior to performing any strenuous activities. Continual intake of water and/or other cool liquids is essential. These same considerations should be applied, not only at work, but with every activity we undertake at home. Heat stress and heat stroke are preventable as long as the necessary precautions are applied.

Submitted by:

Kimberly Hensley, Safety and Loss Control Specialist, WV BRIM