If You Can’t Take the Heat – Speak Up!



Safety Talk

What’s at Stake?

The body normally cools itself by sweating. During hot weather, especially with high humidity, sweating isn’t enough. Body temperature can rise to dangerous levels if you don’t drink enough water and rest in the shade. You can suffer from heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

In 2014 alone, 2,630 workers suffered from heat illness and 18 died from heat stroke and related causes on the job. Heat illnesses and deaths are preventable.

What’s the Danger?

Any worker exposed to hot and humid conditions is at risk of heat illness, especially those doing heavy work tasks or using bulky protective clothing and equipment. Some workers might be at greater risk than others if they have not built up a tolerance to hot conditions, including new workers, temporary workers, or those returning to work after a week or more off. All workers are at risk during a heat wave.

The three main heat related illnesses are heat stroke, heat exhaustion, and heat cramps. Heat stroke can be fatal and heat exhaustion and heat cramps can quickly lead to heat stroke if left untreated.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is a condition that occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature, and can cause death or permanent disability.

Symptoms

- High body temperature
- Confusion
- Loss of coordination
- Lack of sweating despite the heat
- Red, hot, and dry skin
- Throbbing headache
- Seizures, coma

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is the body’s response to an excessive loss of water and salt, usually through sweating.

Symptoms

- Rapid heart beat
- Heavy sweating
- Extreme weakness or fatigue
- Dizziness
- Nausea, vomiting
- Irritability
- Fast, shallow breathing
- Slightly elevated body temperature

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps affect workers who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. Sweating depletes the body’s salt and moisture levels and this can cause heat cramps.

Symptoms

- Muscle cramps, pain, or spasms in the abdomen, arms or legs

How to Protect Yourself

- To prevent heat related illness and fatalities:
- Drink water every 15 minutes, even if you are not thirsty.
- Rest in the shade to cool down.
- Wear a hat and light-colored clothing.
- Learn the signs of heat illness and what to do in an emergency.
- Keep an eye on fellow workers.
- “Easy does it” on your first days of work in the heat. You need to get used to it.

If you or a co-worker are experiencing signs of any heat related illness follow the first aid guidelines below.

First Aid

Heat Stroke

- Request immediate medical assistance.
- Move the worker to a cool, shaded area.
- Remove excess clothing and apply cool water to their body.

Heat Exhaustion

- Rest in a cool area.
- Drink plenty of water or other cool beverages.
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.

Heat Cramps

- Stop all activity, and sit in a cool place.
- Drink clear juice or a sports beverage, or drink water with food.
- Avoid salt tablets.
- Do not return to strenuous work for a few hours after the cramps subside.
- Seek medical attention if you have the following: heart problems, are on a low-

sodium diet, or if the cramps do not subside within one hour.

Final Word

Speak up if you think you’re experiencing heat related issues or if you see a co-worker struggling. You can beat the heat by working smartly, taking quick action and getting proper care as soon as symptoms start to develop.