

Warm Weather is Here. Be Aware of the Hazards of Heat Stress.



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Heat Stress is a common hazard in the workplace. The danger increases with the warm weather approaching. Several workers are killed from the effects of the heat yearly and many more become ill. To protect yourself you need to be aware of the effects that heat has on the body, the symptoms of heat stress, and activities you can undertake to prevent or relieve the effects of heat stress.

Heat Gain or Loss

Your body has a built in mechanism that attempts to keep your body temperature at 98.5 degrees Fahrenheit. The body will gain or lose heat through: 1. Radiation-transferring heat to or from objects not in contact with the body. 2. Convection-transferring heat to and from the air moving over the skin. 3. Conduction-transferring heat through contact with objects. 4. Evaporation-cooling when air absorbs body moisture. When your body fails to cool itself and your body temperature rises, a heat related illness may occur. The two most common heat-induced illnesses are heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion occurs when the body's heat control mechanism is overworked but hasn't broken down completely. Some symptoms may include: weakness or fatigue, heavy sweating, nausea, cool moist skin, a pale or flushed complexion, vomiting or fainting. If you or a co-worker experiences these symptoms you should:

- Move them to a shaded area.
- Loosen their clothing.
- Have them sip water for about an hour.
- Cool the body as soon as possible by applying cold, wet cloths or moving the victim to a cool place.
- Should vomiting occur, get medical attention immediately.

A physician may recommend a follow-up examination. They will likely recommend non-strenuous activities, rest and restoration of body fluids.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is a far more serious form of heat stress that requires immediate medical attention. During heat stroke the victim's body temperature soars because the body is depleting its salt and water supplies. Here, sweating stops and the body is unable to cool itself through evaporation. Some of the symptoms of heat stroke include:

1. The body temperature raises to about 105 degrees or higher
2. Confusion or delirium
3. Difficulty breathing
4. Loss of consciousness.

Should a co-worker experience the symptoms of heat stroke you should:

- Call an ambulance immediately.
- Move the victim to a cool area and start to lower their body temperature as quickly as possible. This can be done by:
 - Soaking clothing in water.
 - Applying cold packs.
 - Place them in a tub of cool water.
 - Use fans or air conditioning.

Prevention

To protect yourself and your co-workers from the hazards of heat stress learn to recognize the warning signs and take the appropriate measures to protect yourself.

Consider the following preventive measures:

- Acclimate yourself to the warm climate. Gradually increase the period of time you perform strenuous activity mixing it with rest or lighter work periods.
- Work in pairs during hot conditions.
- Drink plenty of water. Usually 1 cup every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeinated drinks.
- Wear lightweight, light-collared, loose-fitting clothing.
- Stay in good physical condition. Obesity, lack of conditioning, and lack of adequate rest can increase heat-related incidents.
- Alternate work and rest periods. When possible take rest periods in cooler areas.
- Monitor temperatures and if possible adjust work hours to the cooler periods of the day.