SAFETY NEWS – HEAT STRESS

Working in the heat can be risky to your health. Life-threatening problems can occur if your body is unable to stay cool enough in hot temperatures or high humidity. Heat stress causes a range of health effects, which can lower your job performance and become life-threatening if left untreated.

Health Risks

• **Heat stroke** is life-threatening. Your body can no longer cool itself. You may have hot, dry skin, experience confusion, convulsions, or loss of consciousness. **Heat stroke can kill.** If you or a coworker experience symptoms, call 911 and get emergency medical help!

• **Heat exhaustion** develops when your body has lost too much fluid. Signs of heat exhaustion include damp, flushed skin, feeling tired, nauseous, headachy, or giddy.

• **Heat cramps** occur when salt your body loses from sweating isn’t replaced. They affect the muscles you use most and can set in after you’ve left work.

• **Heat rash** occurs when sweat can’t evaporate from your skin. It can make work activities difficult to perform.

PROTECT YOURSELF!

• Know and report early signs and symptoms.

• Drink water frequently.

• Take breaks in cool, shaded areas.

• Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.

• Report problems with heat, AC or drinking water.

Spotlight on Breaks: No OSHA standard exists on heat breaks. However, the chart below provides U.S. Army guidance for work/rest cycles and hydration practices based on the combined temperature and humidity (shown as the WBGT Index below left) and physical exertion. Remember, these are minimum guidelines, not strict rules. Take action as soon as you or a coworker begins to feel symptoms of heat stress!

Fluid Replacement Guidelines for Warm Weather Training

<table>
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<tr>
<th>HEAT CATEGORY</th>
<th>WBGT INDEX DEGREES F</th>
<th>EASY WORK</th>
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Take breaks and be alert to signs of heat stress when >85°F. Implement all precautions when ≥95°F – the DANGER ZONE for heat exhaustion and stroke.
A SAFE WORKPLACE IS YOUR RIGHT!

To protect workers from heat stress, employers can:

- Provide **clean water** in convenient locations at all work areas.
- Schedule frequent **rest and water breaks**.
- **Reduce work demands** or scheduling heavy labor for cooler times.
- Ensure adequate **air circulation** in work areas (e.g. ventilation).
- Provide adequate and immediate **medical response** in the event of heat stress.
- **Choose PPE with heat stress in mind.**

**Factors Affecting Heat Stress Risk:**

- High heat or humidity
- Clothing and PPE
- Physical exertion
- Air circulation (e.g. fan, breeze)
- Direct sun or extreme heat exposure (e.g. hot equipment)
- Physical condition – **You are at greater risk if you:**
  - are 65+
  - are overweight
  - have heart disease
  - have high blood pressure
  - are sick or have been recently ill
- Acclimatization (heat tolerance) – **Be extra careful during early summer and hot spells when your body is not as adapted.**

**DON’T “TOUGH IT OUT”….. A SUPERVISOR (OR COWORKER) MUST TAKE YOU TO A COOLER AREA IMMEDIATELY IF YOU FEEL FAINT, DIZZY OR CONFUSED…..IT IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY!**

**Additional Resources:**
- [Water.Rest.Shade](#) – OSHA’s Campaign to Prevent Heat Illness in Outdoor Workers
- [Protecting Workers from Heat Illness](#) – OSHA/NIOSH Info sheet
- [Heat: A Major Killer](#) – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**Health and Safety Task Force**

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