

Safety Cop



Sun's Up, Better Beware

With winter gone, it's time to look at the dangers of working in hot weather, and know how to prevent the serious, or potentially fatal, consequences of heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

Temperature, humidity, work intensity, certain medicines, caffeine, alcohol, improper dress and inadequate water intake can affect a worker's tolerance to heat. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are serious and demand prompt attention. Although these conditions sound similar, they are different. Workers and supervisors should learn the symptoms and proper treatment for each.

Heat Stroke v. Heat Exhaustion

Heat stroke is a medical emergency requiring immediate professional medical attention. Symptoms include dry, pale skin with no sweating, hot, red skin that looks sunburned, mood changes such as irritability, confusion, or an inability to think straight, seizures, unconsciousness, and an abnormally high body temperature.

The outcome of an episode of heat stroke depends on prompt medical attention and the effectiveness of first aid, which includes placing the worker in a shady area, removing the worker's outer clothing, wetting the worker's skin, and facilitating air movement around the worker to improve evaporative cooling until professional emergency medical help arrives.

Replace fluids in the worker as soon as possible. Despite a worker's protests, no one suspected of suffering heat stroke should be sent home or left unattended.

Heat exhaustion, although not necessarily a medical emergency, also requires prompt treatment. Symptoms include headaches, dizziness, weakness, mood changes, upset stomach, vomiting, decreased or dark-colored urine, fainting, and pale, clammy skin.

Fainting can be dangerous because the victim may be operating machinery or otherwise performing an operation that could result in injury if the victim loses consciousness. Workers suffering from heat exhaustion should be removed from the heat, given plenty of fluids and advised to get adequate rest.

Prevention

Train workers to respond to heat-induced symptoms and make them aware of these safeguards:

- Perform heavy work during the coolest part of the day,
- Use the buddy system; work in pairs,
- Drink plenty of cool water,
- Wear light weight, light colored, loose fitting clothes,
- Take frequent, short breaks in shade,
- Refrain from alcohol and caffeine.

