

TOOLBOX TALKS

Preventing Heat-Related Injuries and Illnesses FactSheet

Extreme Heat

Workers can suffer heat-related injuries, illnesses, and even death when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. Normally, the body cools itself by sweating, but under some conditions just sweating is not enough. When a person's body temperature rises rapidly their vital organs are threatened. In a typical year about 175 Americans succumb to heat. Heat kills more people each year in the United States than tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, or lightning.

Workers that are at high risk of heat-related injury and illness are: the elderly, the chronically ill, and those in urban areas. It is, however, important to remember that no matter your health, and regardless of where you live, extreme heat can tax the body beyond its ability to cool.

The following are some tips for employers to protect their workers during extreme heat:

- check on workers frequently;
- encourage workers to slow down;
- avoid strenuous activity;
- avoid too much sunshine;
- postpone outdoor tasks or schedule work for the early morning;
- wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing;
- protect face and head by wearing a wide-brimmed hat;
- wear UV-absorbent sunglasses to protect the eyes;
- take frequent breaks if working outdoors;
- drink plenty of water regularly and often;
- avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine; and
- eat small meals and eat more often.

The National Weather Service has developed the heat index to measure how hot it really feels when the effect of humidity is considered. When the temperature and/or the heat index are expected to be 100 degrees, a heat advisory is issued. A heat warning is issued for temperatures and/or heat index of 110 degrees or more.

The best defense against heat-related injury and illness is prevention. Staying cool and making simple changes in fluid intake, activities, and clothing during hot, humid weather can help the body cope with the heat.

Remember to practice safety. Don't learn it by accident.

This fact sheet was published with information from the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration Weather Service, the Consumers Energy, and the Texas Department of Insurance/Division of Workers' Compensation.



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