

Working in the Heat: Safety Tips for Outdoor Workers



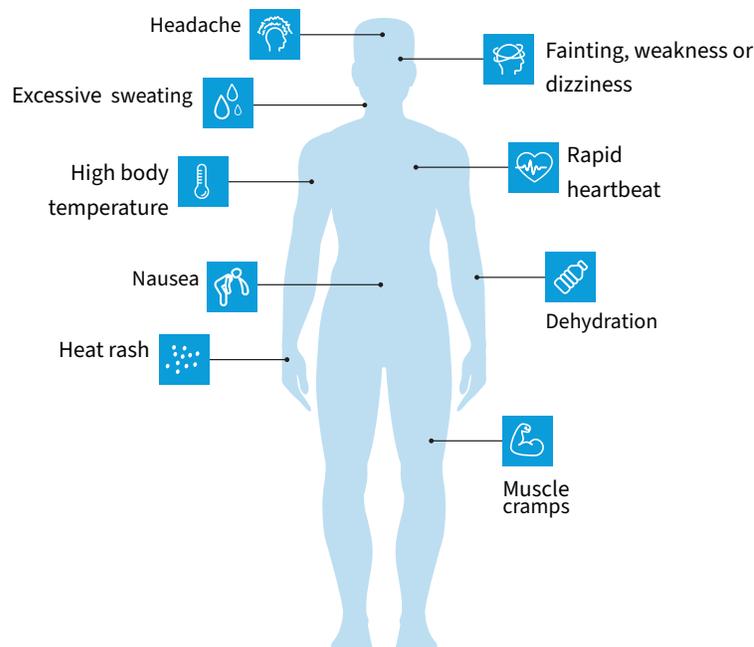
Temperatures are rising across the country, which also means an increase in the risk of workers suffering heat-related illnesses. Throughout the summer months, outdoor workers and workers in non-air-conditioned spaces in a variety of industries are often exposed to extreme heat and/or humidity that can easily lead to heat stress and exhaustion, heat stroke and even death. Thousands of workers

nationwide can suffer heat-related illnesses every year; however, the good news is that these conditions can be avoided when the proper preventative steps are taken.

The Dangers of Heat Stress and Other Heat-Related Illnesses

Heat stress begins when high temperatures and/or humidity cause workers' bodies' natural cooling mechanisms to become ineffective, and the body core temperature rises. A few of the most common signs of heat stress in workers include:

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Heat stroke, the most severe form of heat-related illness, is a life-threatening emergency. It develops rapidly when the body's cooling system begins to fail, especially when a person is dehydrated and cannot sweat enough to cool down effectively. This is why it's so important that employers train workers and supervisors to ensure they understand the dangers of heat stress and how it can impact their overall health and safety. Even before heat stroke sets in, heat stress can make workers tired, lose acuity and muscular dexterity, and make mental mistakes, all of which can lead to other workplace accidents.

Summer Safety Tips for Workers

Along with proper training on heat stress, there are additional measures employers can take to protect their employees from heat-related illnesses. First, managers and supervisors should be well-trained in recognizing the signs of the heat-related illnesses mentioned above to ensure they can get help immediately should a dangerous situation occur. Additionally, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends employers establish a prevention program that includes:

Developing and implementing an acclimatization plan

Acclimatization is defined as “the beneficial physiological adaptations that occur after gradual exposure to a hot environment.” Workers should gradually increase the time spent in heat and humidity over a two-week period. For new workers, exposure to heat should be only around 20 percent on day 1, increasing another 20 percent with each passing day on the job.

Keeping workers hydrated

Provide ample amounts of water and fluids throughout an outdoor shift. Workers should drink small amounts of water throughout the day before thirst sets in. NIOSH recommends that even in moderately hot conditions in which there is a medium level of activity, workers need to consume one cup of water every fifteen to twenty minutes.

Encouraging appropriate clothing

Workers should wear breathable, loose-fitting and lightly colored attire composed of material like cotton to keep them cool in the harsh summer sun. If possible, they should also wear wide-brimmed hats to block some of the sun's rays from their heads and faces. Keep in mind that protective clothing or personal protective equipment may increase the risk of heat stress. But, also be aware that heat stress can strike workers inside buildings where ambient outdoor temperatures and humidity may be present or even higher than outside.

Scheduling frequent breaks

Establish a work/rest schedule that allows workers to take regular breaks. Provide cool, shaded or air-conditioned areas for these breaks. Workers should also be required to take a meal break to eat and help replenish any lost electrolytes they've lost by sweating over the course of their shift.

Checking in on workers

Finally, supervisors and managers should keep an eye on their employees to quickly recognize when/if any individuals are suffering symptoms of heat-related illnesses. Whenever necessary, provide prompt medical attention to any workers showing these symptoms. Additionally, monitor the weather reports daily and reschedule any strenuous outdoor tasks to periods of the day when the heat and humidity are not at their peak. Strenuous work creates internal heat from muscular contractions, which contributes to the heat load on a worker, so if work cannot be rescheduled, expectations for the physical activity of workers must be lowered. Continue to evaluate work practices to minimize the exertion and environmental heat stress workers must endure.

Reduce Risk this Summer with Loss Control Services from AmTrust Financial

AmTrust's Loss Control Department offers valuable resources to create the most effective loss control program for the specific needs of our insureds, including information for talking to employees about heat stress prevention. It's our goal to help small businesses assess the conditions, practices and processes of the workplace to help identify hazards, recommending strategies to help reduce, control or eliminate accidents and losses. For more information, please contact us today.