

RICOSH Worksite Solutions

BEAT THE HEAT:

In the last decade at least 384 workers died from environmental heat exposure in the U.S., according to an investigation by NPR and Columbia Journalism Investigations

Workers are at risk because their livelihoods often depend on their exposure to hot weather and hot environs. In addition to outdoor occupations, such as farm, utility, landscaping, delivery, and construction, others who work in hot indoor environments include kitchens, laundries, warehouses are at risk.

Exposure to heat combined with physical activity and other factors in the environment can increase the body's temperature and cause heat stress. The body responds to heat stress by trying to stabilize body temperature; however core temperature can be chronically stressed and subsequently overwhelmed leading to more significant impacts like heat exhaustion and heat stroke which can be fatal. Unrelieved heat strain increases the risk for heat-related illness. Heat stress and heat strain can also increase risk of injuries from dizziness or falls.

Many factors impact heat stress and heat strain, including air temperature, humidity, exposure to radiant sources and equipment, clothing, physical exertion, and hydration. This is a simple checklist to plan ahead but for more detail and more specific guidance consult the CDC website {www.cdc.gov.} and the OSHA website (www.OSHA.gov.)

Elements of Heat-Healthy Program for Workers:

- *Download OSHA-NIOSH APP Heat Safety Tool. [Real-time heat index and hourly forecasts, specific to your location, with safety recommendations from OSHA/NIOSH.]*
- *Regular hydration (fluid intake) is vital. But water and sports drink intake alone will not prevent heat illnesses. It is also important to adjust the work environment and regimen.*
- *Take frequent rest breaks. If you work outdoors try to take these breaks inside or in a cool shaded area. The hotter it gets, take more and longer breaks.*
- *Schedule heavy work at cooler times.*
- *Use a 'buddy system' to monitor for signs of heat stress, but maintain social distancing if possible.*
- *Workers and staff should have time to adjust to hot environments.*
- *Shield machinery or equipment that produces heat.*
- *Supply portable general ventilation and spot cooling in hot work areas.*
- *Providing cooling protective clothing (e.g. water-cooled/ air cooled garments, vests, cooling/ wetted overgarments, etc).*
- *Eat smaller meals and avoid sugar, caffeinated drinks, and alcohol.*
- *Provide training and select a crew or staff member for specific emergency medical training on how to recognize and handle victims of heat stroke.*
- *Review hazards and precautions when a heat wave is predicted.*

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