

Heat Stress

by David Davidson - HBA

OHBA Safety Pages

When the mercury hits 90 degrees or more, working outdoors can be uncomfortable and at times unsafe. Workers run the risk of developing a heat-related illness when physical exertion is combined with high humidity. Over the past five years, 32 workers received benefits through Oregon's workers' compensation system for heat-related illnesses. The workers who qualified for the benefit were disabled for three days or more.

Employers and workers should be familiar with some of the common indicators of heat exhaustion. A person overcome with heat exhaustion will still sweat but may experience extreme fatigue, nausea, lightheadedness, or a headache. The person could have clammy and moist skin, a pale complexion, and a normal or only slightly elevated body temperature. If heat exhaustion is not treated promptly, the illness could progress to heat stroke, and possibly even death.

SYMPTOMS OF HEAT STRESS DISORDERS:

Heat Cramps — Symptoms are painful spasms of the muscles. Heat cramps are caused when workers consume large quantities of water but fail to take in enough salt to replace the salt their bodies lost through sweating. Tired muscles are most susceptible to cramping.

Heat Exhaustion — Symptoms for this disorder are moist, clammy, pale skin; profuse sweating; extreme weakness or fatigue; dry mouth; dizziness; fast pulse; rapid breathing; muscle cramps; and nausea.

Heat/Sun Stroke — Symptoms are a very high body temperature (104° F or higher); lack of sweat; mental confusion, delirium or hallucinations; deep breathing and rapid pulse; hot, dry, red or mottled skin; and dilated pupils. Seek medical help at once for this condition.

Workers on construction sites may be at greater risk for heat illness due to heavy exertion, enclosed operator cabs with poor air circulation, and prolonged exposure to the sun.

The ideal situation to prevent heat illness and sun exposure injuries is to protect workers. Here are some tips:

- Learn the signs and symptoms of heat-induced illnesses and what to do to help other workers.
- Perform the heaviest, most labor-intensive work during the coolest part of the day.
- Slowly build up tolerance to the heat and the work activity (this usually takes up to two weeks).
- Use the buddy system to monitor the heat (work in pairs).
- Drink plenty of cool water (one cup every 15-20 minutes).
- Wear light, loose-fitting, breathable clothing (such as cotton).
- Protect the skin by wearing a brimmed hat, long sleeves and sunscreen with a SPF rating of at least 15.
- Protect your eyes with safety sun glasses that block at least 99 percent of both UV-A & UV-B rays.
- Take frequent short breaks in cool, shaded areas — allow your body to cool down.
- Avoid eating large meals before working in hot environments.
- Avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages (these beverages make the body lose water and increase the risk of heat illnesses).



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SAFETY PAGE MEETING GUIDE

Topic: Heat Stress

Employer: _____ Project: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Shift: _____

Number in crew: _____ Number attending: _____

Safety or Health issues discussed. Include recent accident investigations and hazards involving tools, equipment, the work environment, work practices and any Safety or Health recommendations:

Follow up on recommendations from last safety meeting:

Record of those attending:

Name: (please print)	Signature:	Company:
1.		
2.		
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12.		

Supervisor's remarks: _____

Supervisor: _____ (Print) _____ (Signature)