

WORKING IN HEAT



WHAT ARE THE RISKS FROM HEAT?

Working in hot conditions can result in adverse health effects, including serious illness.

Risk factors include:

- air temperature, air movement and humidity
- level of work activity
- type of clothing
- level of fluid loss and replacement
- sources of radiant heat.

Risks occur when body temperature rises to an unsafe level or excessive fluid loss results in dehydration.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF HEAT STRESS?

Heat illness includes skin rashes, dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

There can be rapid progression from heat exhaustion to heat stroke, which may have irreversible effects.

Does heat:

- increase the risk of injuries
- interact with other workplace hazards, such as exposure to hazardous substances

- aggravate existing medical conditions, such as pre-existing heart conditions
- adversely affect sperm quality.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EMPLOYERS?

Employers must:

- consult with employees and OHS representatives
- provide adequate and appropriate information, training, instruction and supervision
- identify, assess and control hazards associated with heat
- provide an appropriate physical and organisational environment
- provide healthy and safe workplaces and work systems, including protection against heat stress.

ORGANISING TO PREVENT INJURY AND DISEASE FROM HEAT

Workers should:

- meet to discuss causes, effects and possible solutions to injury and disease caused by heat - see ACTU Guidelines for Working in Seasonal Heat at www.actu.asn.au/public/papers/heat.html

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- collectively determine how to achieve a healthy and safe workplace.

Your health and safety representative and committee, or your union delegate, should be involved. Health and safety representatives and union delegates should:

- ensure that all workers know that they have the right to refuse work likely to endanger them
- collect evidence of the problem - for example talk to workers, do a survey
- meet with the employer
- seek control of hazards at their source
- develop a prevention policy in consultation with workers and management
- include heat in enterprise agreements
- contact the union or OHS inspectors if necessary.

If an employer will not act on health and safety issues, OHS representatives in some states and territories may issue provisional improvement notices (PINs). These are official notices to an employer that a health and safety issue exists and needs to be fixed.

Health and safety inspectors can direct employers to fix problems in the workplace and may issue prohibition or improvement notices. If a person reports discomfort or stress from the heat, they must be able to:

- immediately stop work, go to a cool area, rest, drink and, if necessary, receive first aid treatment
- not resume work until recovered.

TRAINING

Is training in the identification, assessment and control of the hazards associated with working in heat provided for occupational health and safety representatives and union delegates as well as for managers and supervisors?

CONTROL OF HEAT HAZARDS

Are the working environment and/or working arrangements controlled to eliminate or reduce exposure to the hazards of heat?

THE INDOOR WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Are indoor workplace temperatures kept to

between 18 and 26 degrees celsius where possible?

THE OUTDOOR WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Do arrangements to protect outdoor workers from heat and UV radiation include:

- shelters, tents and, in the case of hot dry winds, windbreaks
- provision of suitable clothing, hats etc
- provision of air-conditioned work vehicles?

ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORKING IN HEAT

Work organisation measures should be introduced when the work environment cannot be controlled sufficiently to reduce temperature and/or humidity.

Do these measures include:

- rotation of tasks within workplaces and between employees
- avoidance of long periods of standing in hot conditions
- rescheduling of harder physical work to the cooler times of the day
- reduced work rates and/or work pace in hot conditions
- running hot plant (for example, ovens) in cooler times of the day?

So workplaces have the basic amenities of drinking water, lunch or restrooms and first aid facilities?

REST BREAKS FOR WORKING IN HEAT

Where the temperature at work exceeds 26 degrees celsius, preventative measures should be taken before workers suffer heat stress.

Rest break regimes should reflect local conditions and take specific risk factors into consideration. Rest break regimes may, for example, be varied in northern climates, where there may be some need for acclimatisation to working in heat.

Where escape from the elements may be difficult, even impossible, with outdoor work, rest breaks and stopwork should be initiated.