

Protect workers from summer heat hazards

Summer has arrived with a vengeance over much of the United States, with high temperatures in the 90s for days at a time. That means employees who work outdoors or in spaces without air conditioning are at high risk for heat illness.

According to the federal National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety, working in hot environments puts employees at risk for heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat rashes.

Heat also increases the risk of injuries resulting from sweaty palms, fogged-up safety glasses and dizziness. Burns may also occur as a result of accidental contact with hot surfaces.

Warning: Heat stroke—which usually occurs following prolonged exertion in high heat—results in body temperatures of 104 F or higher. It is potentially fatal. Call 911 right away if a worker has a high temperature, rapid pulse, headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion or a loss of consciousness.

NIOSH urges employers to provide training to workers so they understand what heat stress is, how it affects their health and safety and how it can be prevented. Some recommendations:

- Schedule the most strenuous work for the morning hours if possible.
- Limit time workers spend in the heat. Provide more and longer rest breaks.
- Lighten the load by adding staff.
- Use a buddy system, so workers can keep an eye on each other.
- Provide lots of cool water and encourage employees to drink frequently. Tell them not to wait until they are thirsty. Four ounces of water per hour is considered the minimum consumption rate when temperatures exceed 90 F.
- Tell employees: If you feel faint or weak, stop work immediately!

Mobile resource NIOSH and OSHA offer a free mobile heat safety app that supervisors can use to help keep workers safe. It's available at www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/heatapp.html.