How Can Heat Illness be Prevented in the Workplace?

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Thousands of workers become sick from exposure to heat every year, and some even die. Heat illnesses and deaths are preventable, and employers must take responsibility for protecting their employees while they are working under conditions of excessive heat.

Workers exposed to hot and humid conditions are at risk of heat illness, especially those doing heavy work tasks or using bulky protective clothing and equipment. New and temporary workers, as well as those returning to work after time off, are especially susceptible to heat-related illness if they have not built up a tolerance to hot conditions. Industries most affected by heat-related illness are construction, trades, transportation and utilities, agriculture, building and grounds maintenance, landscaping services and support activities for oil and gas operations.

Employers can significantly reduce the risk of heat-related illness by establishing a comprehensive heat illness prevention program, including:

- Providing workers with water, rest and shade;
- Allowing new and temporary workers and anyone who has been off the job for a week or more to build a tolerance for hot conditions by gradually increasing workloads and allowing more frequent breaks (acclimatization);
- Modifying work schedules as necessary;
- Planning for emergencies and training workers about the symptoms of heat-related illnesses and their prevention;
- Monitoring workers for signs of illness.

Workers can reduce their risk of heat-related illness and fatalities by:

- Drinking water every 15 minutes
- Resting in the shade to cool down
- Wearing a hat and light-colored clothing
- Learning the signs of heat illness and what to do in an emergency
- Keeping an eye on fellow workers
- Building a tolerance for heat (acclimatization) on the first days of work

Three simple words – Water, Rest, Shade – form the core of an effective heat illness prevention program, and can not only reduce the risk of heat-related illness but also save lives.

About the OSHA Training Center

The OSHA Training Center at Chabot-Las Positas Community College District offers high quality Occupational Safety & Health Administration standards-based training for construction, maritime, and general industry at its Center in Dublin, California, as well as locations throughout California, Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada and Guam. Programs offered include OSHA safety standards, Outreach Trainer courses, Cal/OSHA standards curriculum, environmental courses and customized onsite safety training. For more information, including a complete course schedule, visit the OSHA Training Center website *[1] or call (866) 936-OSHA (6742).*

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