Environmental Health & Safety

May 2015—How to Stay Healthy in the Heat

WATER. REST. SHADE.
The work can't get done without them.

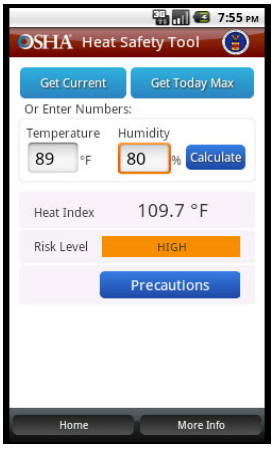
Heat-Related Illness Can be Prevented

As temperatures increase outside, so does the risk for a heat-related illness. Any employee exposed to hot or humid conditions are at risk for a heat-related illness. Employers have a general duty to protect employees from recognized serious hazards such as heat-related illness. Any outdoor worker is at risk when the heat index is high, however care must also be taken if the heat index is lower and the employee works in direct sunlight, performs strenuous work for long periods of time or if the employee must wear heavy protective clothing or clothes that are impermeable. Working in direct sunlight actually adds 15 degrees to the heat index.

An investigation by Cal/OSHA revealed that in almost half of the 25 heat-related incidents investigated, the heat-related incident occurred on the workers first day, while 80% of the heat-related illness occurred when the employee had only been on the job for less than 5 days. This data provides additional support for the belief that workers new to outdoor jobs are generally most at risk for heat-related illnesses. It reminds employers and supervisors of the need to acclimate new employees by allowing more breaks, and gradually increasing the workload and strenuous activity. Any employee that has not worked in hot weather for a week or longer will need time for their bodies to adjust. A heat acclimatization program is recommended where those returning from a prolonged absence should begin with only 20% of the workload on the first day. Note that full acclimatization may take an extended period of time if employees have a health condition that places the employee at greater risk for a heat-related illness. Additional information regarding acclimatizing workers can be found here.

Acclimatizing workers is only one step in heat-related illness prevention. There are many more steps, like drinking plenty of water, wearing hats and light-colored clothing, and rest. For more resources on protecting employees from heat-related illnesses and warning signs of heat-illness, see more details. Learn the facts , plan ahead, train employees on the dangers, and know how to respond to an emergency.

Heat Safety Tool—Smartphone App



The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) , Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has released an app that allows supervisors to calculate the heat index for their worksites by simply entering the temperature and humidity level. The app then provides a risk level and the recommended precautions to take regarding fluid intake, rest breaks and emergency planning. Remember working in full sunlight can increase heat index values by as much as 15 degrees Fahrenheit. The app is available for both Android and iPhone devices. More information is available here.

More Details Training Resource provided by Kentucky Occupational Safety & Health Online Training

For questions or comments relating to the material? Contact Christy Herron (cherron@fa.ua.edu) or 205-348-5939.