

Heat Stress

As with all safety related injuries and illnesses, training and knowledge is the most effective means of prevention.

Prevention

The best ways to decrease the possibility of heat stress is to:

- train all employees on the signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses and how to respond;
- schedule the hardest work during the coolest part of the day;
- encourage the buddy system (employees working in hot environments in pairs);
- provide plenty of cool water and encourage employees to drink one cup *every 15 to 20 minutes*; encourage employees to wear light-colored, loose fitting, breathable (cotton) clothing;
- provide frequent short breaks in cool shaded areas;
- encourage employees to avoid eating large meals or consuming caffeine and alcoholic beverages before and during work in hot environments;
- use exhaust ventilators or air blowers;
- use fans and/or air conditioning;
- provide tools and equipment that reduce physical demands on employees.

Unfortunately, no matter how much training we do, incidents still occur. For this reason, it's equally important to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat stress.

Signs and Symptoms

Excessive exposure to a hot environment can bring about a variety of heat-related health problems.

Heat cramps may occur alone or simultaneously with other heat-related illnesses. Heat cramps are painful muscle spasms caused by sweating while performing hard physical labor in a hot environment. The cramps may be caused by either too much or too little salt. Tired muscles are very susceptible to heat cramps.

Fainting may occur when an employee who is not used to the heat stands in one position for an extended period. An employee who has fainted should recover after a brief period sitting or lying down. Moving around, rather than standing still, will reduce the possibility of fainting.

Heat Exhaustion is caused by the loss of large amounts of fluid by sweating, sometimes with excessive loss of salt. An employee suffering from heat exhaustion still sweats but may experience the signs and symptoms listed below:

- headache, dizziness, weakness, mood changes (confused or irritable)
- feeling sick to stomach, vomiting
- decreased and dark-colored urine, light-headedness or fainting, pale clammy skin