

BEAT THE HEAT



Summer is here and with it the heat and the added danger of suffering heat-related illnesses at the construction site. For construction workers, the summer heat is not only uncomfortable but also dangerous.

Construction workers are at a higher risk for heat-related illnesses due to the strenuous nature of their jobs and prolonged exposure to the heat and humidity brought on during the summer months. In 2014, OSHA reported that 2,630 workers suffered from heat illness while 18 died from heat stroke and related causes on the job—all of which was preventable.

Here are a few tips and tricks to beat the heat at construction sites this summer.



TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS

Taking frequent breaks in the shade helps avoid heat-related illnesses. Any time you are feeling overheated or presenting symptoms of heat stress, take a five-minute break in the shade. Use these breaks to rehydrate and drink water.



ACCLIMATE

OSHA's investigation into heat-related deaths found a majority involved workers on the job for three or less days—highlighting the need for workers to build up a level of tolerance to working in the heat when starting or returning to work.

To acclimatize, easy does it is key. Start doing about 50% of your normal workload and gradually work up to 100% over the next five to seven days so your body can adjust to the heat and strenuous activity.



DRESS FOR SUCCESS

In this case, we aren't talking about a suit and tie. Light-colored, loose fitting and lightweight clothing is the way to go. Natural fiber clothing such as cotton is a good choice because it's breathable and absorbs moisture well.

Moisture wicking clothing also is a smart option because it draws the sweat off your body. This allows your body to cool quicker which is helpful in more humid climates where sweat evaporation becomes more difficult.

Beat the Heat



DRINK!

It's important to stay hydrated throughout the day, but during summer, drinking lots of water is essential. Drinking around 7 - 10 oz. of water or other fluids every 15 - 20 minutes will help keep you hydrated.

While water is great, it isn't the only option. If you find yourself sweating a lot, sip sports drinks (i.e. Gatorade, Powerade, etc.), electrolyte-enhanced water or coconut water to replace electrolytes. Fruits and juices are also a good option—especially water-rich cucumbers, apples and watermelons.

Avoid alcohol, sodas, energy drinks, coffee, milk and caffeinated tea. These are all diuretics, and will only worsen dehydration.

SYMPTOMS OF DEHYDRATION

Dehydration is a condition that occurs when the loss of body fluids exceeds the amount that is taken in.

- Increased thirst
- Dry mouth and swollen tongue
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Inability to sweat
- Confusion
- Sluggishness
- Fainting
- Decreased urine output
- Heart palpitations (jumping or pounding heartbeat)



GET AN EARLY START

The air temperature usually peaks around 3:00 p.m. The earlier you start your day, the better off you'll be. This is especially true if you can finish up or spend a limited time working during the hottest hours of the day. Schedule heavy tasks earlier in the day or at a time during the day when the heat index is lower.



Pro Tip: Start each day with a review of the dangers of heat stress, symptoms and preventative care.



DON'T FORGET THE SUNSCREEN

When working outdoors, use sunscreen. Even on cloudy and overcast days, ultraviolet (UV) rays can still cause sunburn. Reapply often with a broad-spectrum sunscreen that contains zinc oxide, titanium dioxide and/or avobenzone.

Use a sweatproof or waterproof sunscreen to ensure you don't sweat it off. It's also a good idea to wear a wide brimmed hat to block the sun's deadly rays.

Beat the Heat



KEEP COOL

Maintaining a stable body temperature is vital in avoiding a heat-related illness. Once the air temperature gets near or above normal body temperature (98.6°F), the blood circulated to your skin can't lose heat. This causes you to sweat, but that's not enough to cool your body if the humidity won't allow the sweat to evaporate.

To cool your body temperature, get inside an air-conditioned space like a vehicle or jobsite trailer. If you are working indoors with no air conditioning, set up portable fans to increase air circulation. There also are several personal cooling devices on the market like cooling vests or neck coolers that can help you beat the heat.

DIY Air Conditioner

What you need

- Styrofoam cooler
- Ice or Ice Packs
- Fan

1. Cut a hole in the top of the cooler. Place fan on top, blowing into the cooler.
2. Cut several return holes on one side of the cooler to push the cooled air out.
3. Fill with ice or ice packs, refill or replace as needed.



BE AWARE OF THE HEAT INDEX

Employers and workers should always be aware of the heat index. The heat index combines temperature and humidity to determine the “apparent temperature” or what it actually feels like outside.

When the heat index rises to 103°F, crew supervisors should take additional measures to protect workers, including extra, required rest breaks, fewer strenuous tasks and lots of reminders about drinking water. The heaviest tasks should be scheduled for early morning.



Pro Tip: OSHA's Heat Safety Tool App

This free app helps workers and supervisors calculate the heat index for their worksite, and displays a risk level to outdoor workers. You can set reminders to drink water and take breaks and learn what to do when someone exhibits signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion or dehydration.

Beat the Heat



KNOW THE SIGNS

Heat-related illnesses typically come in four forms: heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat rash. Heat rash is the least serious, resulting in red bumps on the skin that often disappear after coolness and rest. Heat stroke is the most severe and can result in death.

Employees need to be trained to know heat-related illness risk factors, prevention methods and signs. Workers should be trained to not only monitor themselves but also their coworkers. They should know how to help, and where to get help, when they or a coworker is suffering from heat stress.



STAY SAFE

Thousands of workers every year are affected by heat-related illnesses. Heatstroke can cause major damage to your organs including your heart, liver and kidneys. It also can cause damage to muscles, blood disorders and death.

Heat exhaustion can cause workers to be less alert resulting in other construction related injuries. By taking the above precautions, most heat-related illnesses can be prevented or caught early enough to treat and avoid serious injury or death.



Pro Tip: Know your cooling points: wrists and neck. Applying a cold cloth or ice pack to these pulse points will cool you down more quickly and effectively.

SYMPTOMS OF HEAT EXHAUSTION

If you—or anyone around you—start to experience these symptoms, it's essential to get out of the heat and rest, preferably in an air-conditioned room. If you can't get inside, find the nearest cool and shady place and drink plenty of water.

- Increased thirst
- Confusion
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Pale skin
- Profuse sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Muscle or abdominal cramps
- Dark-colored urine

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