Syracuse Builders Exchange
FOUNDED 1872

BIE SAFETY ADVISOR

Working Outdoors in Warm Climates

Hot summer months pose special hazards for outdoor workers who must protect themselves against heat, sun exposure, and other hazards. Employers and employees should know the potential hazards in their workplaces and how to manage them.

Sun

Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and skin cancer. There are no safe UV rays or safe suntans. Be especially careful in the sun if you burn easily, spend a lot of time outdoors, or have any of the following physical features: numerous, irregular, or large moles; freckles; fair skin; or blond, red, or light brown hair. Here's how to block those harmful rays:

- Cover up. Wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Be sure to follow application directions on the bottle or tube.
- Wear a hat. A wide brim hat, not a baseball cap, works best because it protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.
- Wear UV-absorbent sunglasses (eye protection). Sunglasses don't have to be expensive, but they should block 99 to 100 % of UVA and UVB radiation. Before you buy sunglasses, read the product tag or label.
- Limit exposure. UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Heat

The combination of heat and humidity can be a serious health threat during the summer months. If you work outside (for example, on a farm, at a construction site) you may be at increased risk of heat-related illness. So, take precautions. Here's how:

- Drink small amounts of water frequently.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing—cotton is good.
- Take frequent short breaks in cool shade.
- Eat smaller meals before work activity.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol or large amounts of sugar.
- Work in the shade.
- Find out from your health care provider if your medications and heat don't mix.
- Know that equipment such as respirators or work suits can increase heat stress.

There are three kinds of major heat-related disorders—heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. You need to know how to recognize each one and what first aid treatment is necessary.

Lyme Disease/Tick-Borne Diseases

These illnesses (i.e., Lyme, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, HME) are transmitted to people by bacteria from bites of infected ticks. In the case of Lyme disease, most, but not all, victims will develop a "bulls-eye" rash. Other signs and symptoms may be non-specific and similar to flu-like symptoms such as fever, lymph node swelling, neck stiffness, generalized fatigue, headaches, migrating joint aches, or muscle aches. You are at increased risk if your work outdoors involves construction, landscaping, forestry, brush clearing, land surveying, farming, railroads, oil fields, utility lines, or park and wildlife management. Protect yourself with these precautions:

- Wear light-colored clothes to see ticks more easily.
- Wear long sleeves, tuck pant legs into socks or boots.
- Wear high boots or closed shoes that cover your feet completely.
- Wear a hat.
- Use tick repellants, but not on your face.
- Shower after work. Wash and dry your work clothes at high temperature.
- Examine your body for ticks after work. Remove any attached ticks promptly and carefully with fine-tipped tweezers by gripping the tick. Do not use petroleum jelly, a hot match, or nail polish to remove the tick.

Monthly Toolbox Talk

Protecting Workers from Heat Stress

Heat Illness

Exposure to heat can cause illness and death. The most serious heat illness is heat stroke. Other heat illnesses, such as heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat rash, should also be avoided.

There are precautions that can be taken any time temperatures are high and the job involves physical work.

Risk Factors for Heat Illness

- High temperature and humidity, direct sun exposure, no breeze or wind.
- Heavy physical labor.
- No recent exposure to hot workplaces.
- Low liquid intake.
- Tight non-breathable clothing.

Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion

- Headache, dizziness, or fainting.
- Weakness and wet skin.
- Irritability or confusion.
- Thirst, nausea, or vomiting.

Symptoms of Heat Stroke

- May be confused, unable to think clearly, pass out, collapse, or have seizures.
- May stop sweating.

To Prevent Heat Illness

- Designate a responsible person to monitor conditions and protect workers who are at risk of heat stress.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Provide a supply of cool water to workers. At least one pint of water per hour is needed. Avoid beverages that contain caffeine.
- Modify work schedules and arrange for frequent rest periods with water breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas.
- Gradually increase workloads and allow more frequent breaks for workers new to the heat or those that have been away from work to adapt to working in the heat (acclimatization).
- Wear lightweight, light colored, loose-fitting clothing. Consider protective clothing that provides cooling.
- Know signs/symptoms of heat illnesses; monitor yourself; use a buddy system.

Any employee feeling ill should notify a Supervisor immediately.