



## **Eye on Safety**

### **Preventing Heat Stress**

*By Valerie Januski*

With summer upon us, we all need to be aware of the increased possibility of heat-related illnesses and how to prevent them. This is particularly true for those of you who spend most of your day outdoors. Know how to protect yourself and your fellow employees and how to recognize and treat heat emergencies.

#### **Heat Preventative Measures**

- Adjust work schedule to ensure workers are acclimated to work in hot conditions.
- Always schedule work or work requiring heavy physical exertion during the coolest parts of the day.
- Modify the work-rest schedule to shorten heat exposure periods by including frequent rest breaks. Shorter, more frequent breaks are more effective than longer, less frequent rest breaks.
- Provide a shaded and/or air-conditioned space nearby for rest and water breaks.
- Encourage adequate water intake at frequent intervals to prevent dehydration (e.g., one 8-ounce cup of cool water every 15-20 minutes).
- The supervisor or crew leader is responsible for making sure pure and cool potable water is always available to workers while working in the heat.
- Work in pairs (buddy system) and monitor each other for signs and symptoms of heat stress or illness.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol before and during working in a hot environment.

#### **Heat Emergencies**

Heat cramps are painful muscle spasms, usually in the legs and the abdomen.

Heat exhaustion (early state) is an early indicator that the body's cooling system is becoming overwhelmed.

#### **Signals of Heat Exhaustion**

- Cool, moist, pale, flushed or ashen skin
- Headache, nausea, dizziness
- Weakness, exhaustion
- Heavy sweating

Heat Stroke (late stage) is when the body's systems are overwhelmed by heat and stop functioning. Heat stroke is a life-threatening condition.

#### **Signals of Heat Stroke**

- Change in the level of consciousness
- High body temperature
- Red, hot skin that can be either dry or moist
- Rapid or weak pulse
- Rapid or shallow breathing

### **Treatment for any heat-related emergency**

Move the person to a cool place.

Loosen tight clothing.

Remove perspiration-soaked clothing.

Apply cool, wet towels to the skin.

Fan the person.

If the person is conscious, give small amounts of cool water to drink.

### **If the person refuses water, vomits or starts to lose consciousness:**

Send someone to call 911 or the local emergency number.

Place the person on his or her side.

Continue to cool the person by using ice or cold packs on their wrists, ankles, groin and neck and in the armpits.

Continue to check for movement and breathing.

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