

A Tragic Death Underscores the Need for Heat Stress Training



Working in high heat and humidity is more than uncomfortable. It can also be deadly. [Heat stress](#) is especially lethal when it sneaks up on victims. That should never be allowed to happen. Heat stress doesn't strike without warning. But when you don't make supervisors and workers [aware](#) of its signs and symptoms, you render them vulnerable. Worse, you empower them to do things that actually make the danger worse, like drinking beer when they're feeling overheated. That's why educating your workforce about the [dangers of heat stress](#) can literally be a matter of life and death. Here's a real-life story of how lack of education led to a heat stress death that happened in 1992.

Chronicle of a Preventable Heat Stress Death

This is the tale of Anthony Dalton and Ronald Morrissey, trained boilermakers and best friends who've decided to leave their native Newfoundland to take a job in a New Brunswick paper mill.

May 20

Dalton and Morrissey report for their first day of work. The temperatures outside are high for May—34.4° C/94° F, and 35%

humidity. It's even hotter in the mill where chemicals are heated in enclosed spaces. Dalton and Morrissey work inside all day on scaffolds. Dalton starts experiencing fatigue. It's the first warning of danger. But nobody at the plant provided them with any information or warnings about the dangers of heat stress. The contractor will testify later that he just assumed that trained boilermakers would know all about heat stress. It turns out to be a tragically flawed assumption.

May 21

The outdoor temperature has climbed to 37.2° C/99° F. Humidity is at 33%. The heat and hard work in the mill continue. Dalton and Morrissey work the entire day. Dalton is getting worse. When the two get back to their motel after work, Dalton starts experiencing muscle cramps. He's exhausted. He passes out on the bathroom floor of the motel room. He drinks a beer, not recognizing that consuming alcohol will **dehydrate** him when he desperately needs to hydrate.

May 22

It's even hotter today at 38.3° C/101° F. Dalton is still exhausted but decides to drag himself to work. He spends the morning inside one of the tanks helping to build a scaffold. He's in big trouble. After his afternoon break, he tells the supervisor that he's just too exhausted to go back to work. He sits on the floor with his back against the base of a column. When the shift ends, he can barely stand up. He's incoherent. He stumbles about 100 yards and finally collapses. Even now, nobody knows what's wrong. The ambulance takes Dalton to the hospital.

May 23

Anthony Dalton dies of heat stroke in his hospital bed.

Takeaway: Implement a Heat Stress Training Program for Your Workers

Perhaps the saddest part of the death of Anthony Dalton is that it could have been prevented. There was ample warning: Dalton's fatigue, the cramps, his passing out on the bathroom floor, etc. Anybody attuned to the signs of heat stress would have recognized what was going on and acted while there was still time. Tragically, because none of the workers or supervisors with whom Dalton worked had received any education on heat stress, every opportunity to save him was missed.

Don't let what happened to Anthony Dalton happen to one of your own workers!

Implement a [Heat Stress Safety & Compliance Game Plan](#) that includes heat stress training and education. A [heat stress training program](#) should educate workers and supervisors about:

- The different kinds of heat illnesses, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.
- How to spot the symptoms, risk factors, danger signs, and symptoms of each type of heat illness.
- What to do in response to those signs and symptoms.
- The [first-aid procedures](#) for heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- Workers' own responsibilities in [protecting themselves and their coworkers against heat stress](#).
- [Safe work procedures for working in extreme heat and humidity](#).
- The dangers of using drugs, including therapeutic ones, and alcohol in hot work environments.
- The use of [protective clothing and PPE for heat stress](#).
- The purpose and coverage of any [acclimatization](#), environmental, and medical surveillance programs and why workers should participate in them.