

# PPE in the Heat? Not Always a Good Combination



Consider this scenario: It's the middle of July and the third day of a heat wave, with temperatures rising to 37°C. Your workers need to enter a storage bin to clean it. The bin is a confined space and the air inside contains high concentrations of a hazardous substance. So workers must wear appropriate respirators. But wearing a heavy respirator in this hot weather puts them at high risk of heat stress.

What should you do?

On one hand, you can't let workers remove their respirators to avoid heat stress because letting them enter a confined space with a poisonous atmosphere is not only incredibly dangerous but also illegal. Even letting them work without respirators but in short work/rest cycles isn't a good idea.

On the other hand, if you make them wear respirators to protect them from the hazardous chemicals in the air, you're still exposing them to the real risk of heat stress.

The best option is probably simply to delay the cleaning job until the weather cools down. The hazardous atmosphere in the confined space and the heat wave are serious safety hazards and you have a duty to protect workers from *both*. So the only way out of this dilemma is to find a way to let workers do the work using respirators without exposing them to heat stress.

When it comes to protecting workers from heat stress, the scheduling of work outside, especially rigorous work, is one of the tools you can use. For example, you should try to limit such work to the cooler times of day, such as early morning and evening.

To ensure that you have adequate safety measures in place to adequately protect your workers this summer, use this heat stress self-audit checklist. And for more tools, information and other resources, go to the OHS Insider's Heat Stress Compliance Centre.