Spot The Safety Violation: Protecting Workers from One Hazard Shouldn’t Expose Them to Another



Do we really need to explain the safety hazards depicted in this picture’

Heat stress is a real safety hazard during the summer. For example, in the summer of 2012, there were about 82 heat-related deaths in the US and Canada. And yes, providing workers with a shady spot for breaks is one way to help protect them from getting overheated. But there isn’t any situation in which it would be proper for the equipment in this picture to be in this position’much less for workers to take refuge from the heat underneath it.

Heat-Related Illnesses

Heat stress is an umbrella term used to describe the stress or impact on the body when it’s exposed to high temperatures and/or humidity for lengths of time. There are several different types of heat-related illnesses:

- **Heat stroke**: the most serious type of heat illness is a result of body heat overload;
- **Heat exhaustion**, which is caused by excessive loss of

water and salt;
- **Heat edema**, which is a swelling of hands, feet and ankles;
- **Heat rash**, a red bumpy rash with severe itching; and
- **Heat cramps**, which usually occur in the most worked muscles, such as arms, legs or stomach.

The OHS laws in every jurisdiction either directly or indirectly require employers to protect workers from heat stress'whether the source of that heat is the weather or equipment in the workplace.

Example: An Ontario bakery worker died of heat stress on the job. Inside the bakery, the temperatures topped 36°. The MOL charged the bakery with violating the general duty clause because it didn't have a heat stress policy as required by the MOL guidelines. The bakery pleaded guilty and was fined $215,000 [*Weston Bakeries Limited*, Govt. News Release, Feb. 18, 2004].

10 Ways to Protect Workers from Heat Stress

Here are some basics safety measures you can include in a heat stress plan to protect your workers if they're exposed to this safety hazard:

1. Train workers on the dangers of heat illness and how to recognize the signs and symptoms of the various types of heat stress (For example, post this infographic on summer health and safety hazards in the workplace.);
2. Provide workers with cool, fresh water to drink;
3. Give workers tools such as hoists and lifts to make work less strenuous;
4. Provide a shaded area for workers to cool down in'but not one located below heavy machinery;
5. Allow workers to take more frequent breaks;
6. Give workers time to get acclimated to the heat;
7. Try to limit outside or especially rigorous work to the

cooler times of day, such as early morning and evening;
8. Vent heat or steam from the workplace or cool it with air conditioning;
9. Provide fans for better air circulation; and
10. Make sure workers wear appropriate clothing for the conditions, such as lighter colours, lighter weight, short sleeves, etc.

Heat Stress Resources

At OHSInsider.com, go to the Heat Stress Compliance Centre for information and tools on heat stress, including:

- Your legal obligation to protect workers from heat stress
- A model humidex-based heat stress response plan
- A heat stress awareness tool
- The role of heat stress monitors
- A hand out for workers on the danger signs of heat illnesses
- An infographic on summer health and safety hazards
- Several videos on heat stress.