

The Top 5 Workplace Summer Safety Hazards (and What You Can Do About Them)



It's time for warm weather, long weekends, and backyard cookouts. But the summer season also brings unique workplace hazards.

Staying safe during the hot weather means understanding and managing the risks. From illnesses like heat stress and heat stroke to summer construction projects, let's look at some of the top summer safety hazards and how to address them.

Hazard #1: Fatigue

While the summer sun can be a welcome change from cold winter days, it can also lead to fatigue for workers who spend a lot of time in. The sun tends to sap energy for a few reasons:

- Your body is working overtime to keep you cool
- Dehydration sets in more quickly
- UV rays trigger chemical changes in the body

Fatigue is more than just feeling a little tired ' it's a form of impairment. It can reduce mental and physical functioning, affect judgment and concentration, slow reaction time, and lower motivation. For workers who work near traffic or operate heavy machinery, this could mean the difference between ending the shift safely and being rushed to the emergency room.

Symptoms indicating that a worker may be fatigued include:

- Weariness
- Irritability
- Reduced alertness
- Lack of motivation
- Headaches
- Loss of appetite

(Learn more in [7 Signs of Fatigue and How It Affects the Workplace.](#))

How to Manage It

Avoid having workers in direct sun for lengthy periods and offer a shady area where they can take regular breaks.

Provide plenty of water and perhaps a salty snack to help replenish the salt the body loses while sweating.

If possible, hats can also help keep workers cool and protect from the sun.

Hazard #2: Heat-Related Illnesses

“Heat stress” is a blanket term for a handful of heat-related illnesses that can have a serious impact on the health of workers.

The most common of these are heat rashes and heat cramps, both of which generally occur due to excessive sweating in hot, humid conditions. Heat rash (also known as prickly heat) is characterized by small red bumps on the skin, while heat cramps are painful, involuntary muscle contractions that may be a symptom of heat exhaustion.

Heat exhaustion is more serious than rashes or cramps and happens when the body loses too much water and salt from sweating. It often affects workers who are carrying out strenuous work in high temperatures with high humidity. Left untreated, it may lead to heat stroke.

Heat stroke is the most serious of all heat-related illnesses and should always be treated as a medical emergency. It happens when the body is no longer able to control its core temperature or cool itself down.

How to Manage It

Workers and employers both play a role in helping prevent heat-related illnesses from taking hold.

Employers can:

- Adjust schedules to avoid outdoor work during the hottest period of the day (10am to 2pm)
- Reduce the physical demands of workers when temperatures and humidity levels are high
- Use relief workers or assign additional workers for physically demanding tasks
- Provide PPE appropriate to the weather conditions, if possible
- Mandate frequent rest periods in a shaded shelter
- Provide cool water or other non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated beverages to workers
- Train employees to recognize the signs of heat-related illnesses and take action

Workers can:

- Wear clothing that is light colored, loose fitting, and breathable (like cotton)
- Gradually build up to heavy or demanding work
- Take frequent breaks in cool or shady areas
- Monitor themselves and their coworkers for signs of heat stress

(Learn about [New Trends in Equipment to Help Outdoor Workers Beat the Heat.](#))

Hazard #3: Dehydration

Whether it's through breathing, sweating, or urinating, our bodies are constantly losing water. And since water is what keeps our bodies functioning optimally by regulating our core body temperature, carrying nutrients to our organs, and flushing out internal toxins, it's critical that we replenish this lost fluid.

Extreme heat and hard physical labor can increase the rate at which our bodies lose water, depleting our hydration levels and posing a health and safety risk.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Thirst
- Fatigue
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea, dizziness, or confusion
- Excessive sweating
- Hot, dry skin

How to Manage It

Make sure water is readily available and that workers drink it regularly ' about one cup of liquid every 15 to 20 minutes is ideal.

Alcoholic, caffeinated, and sugary drinks can exacerbate dehydration, so it's best to stick with water.

Urine color is an important indicator of hydration levels. Make sure your employees know they should monitor their urine color and what to look for. Clear or pale yellow urine indicates adequate hydration, while darker yellow is a warning of dehydration.

Hazard #4: Sun Exposure

Not to be confused with exposure to heat, direct exposure to the hot summer sun and its intense UV rays poses its own hazard to workers.

Workers who spend long periods of time outside are most at risk, including construction workers, gardeners, and even some public service workers.

The main short-term effect from extended sun exposure is sunburns, which can range from a mild reddening of the skin to more serious burns that blister and peel. It can also contribute to fatigue and dehydration. In the long-term, workers may experience leathery and wrinkled skin and an increased risk of skin cancer, which can be deadly.

How to Manage It

Workers should keep covered up as much as possible, including wearing a hat with a flap or brim to protect the ears and back of the neck.

All areas of exposed skin should be covered with sunscreen and water should be made available to combat dehydration.

Whenever possible, allow for regular breaks in a shady area.

Those with fair skin should check for unusual moles or spots on a regular basis and see a doctor if they find anything that is changing in shape, size, and color, or is itchy or bleeding.

Hazard #5: Road Construction Work

The summer is construction season on roadways around the country. Whether they're filling potholes and paving or directing traffic around utility workers, employees who work on or near busy roadways must constantly battle traffic hazards to remain safe.

According to NIOSH, nearly 100 workers are killed and more than 20,000 injured in work zones every year.

Common hazards include:

- Speeding motorists
- Moving vehicles inside the work zone
- Low visibility conditions
- Crossing busy roadways

How to Manage It

Clearly identify work areas and use barriers and lower speed limits to keep the public (and their vehicles) out of them.

Ensure every worker is equipped with the appropriate PPE for the job, including the correct class of hi-vis gear.

Holding regular training sessions can be an effective way of educating workers about traffic-related hazards and protection plans.

Conclusion

The changing seasons bring a host of new safety challenges to outdoor workers. By identifying and understanding the hazards and taking steps to manage the risk, you can ensure your workers remain safe, healthy, and productive throughout the summer months.

Source: Safeopedia

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