

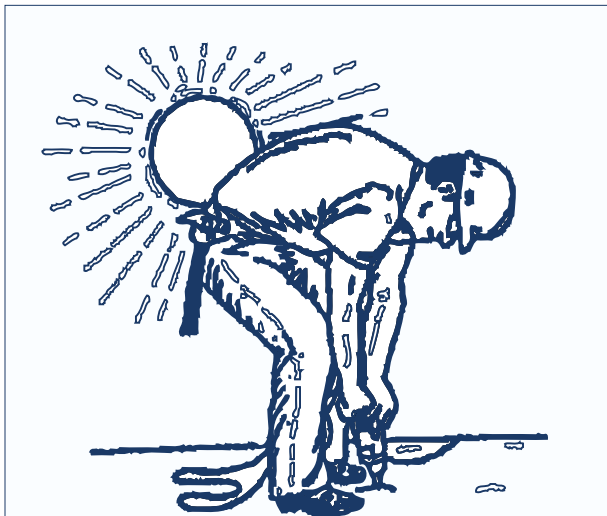
## ■ Working in a Hot Environment



WORKING IN A PLACE that is too hot can be more than uncomfortable. Working in extreme heat can make you sick.

There are four direct health problems that are caused by heat:

- Heat Rash
- Heat Cramps
- Heat Exhaustion
- Heat Stroke



**Heat Rash** (sometimes called Prickly Heat) is skin irritation caused by excessive sweating in hot, humid weather. It is irritating, but it is not a serious condition.

Heat rash can be treated by cooling down and by keeping the rash dry. Powders can be used to make the skin more comfortable, but do not use creams on heat rash.

**Heat Cramps** are muscle pain or spasms that can be experienced by people who are sweating a lot while doing strenuous activity in the heat and humidity. The cramps are usually in the belly, arms or legs.

Medical attention is usually not necessary. The cramps should go away by resting in a cool place and drinking a sports drink or clear juice.

If you have heat cramps, seek medical attention if:

- you have a heart condition
- you are on a low sodium diet
- the cramps do not go away after about an hour

**Heat Exhaustion** even though it is called “exhaustion,” heat exhaustion is not just about being tired. Symptoms of heat exhaustion are heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, and fainting. Heat exhaustion can occur after several days of extreme heat without adequate replacement of fluid.

The skin may be cool and moist. Breathing will be fast and shallow.

Similar to heat cramps, someone suffering from heat exhaustion should rest in a cool place and drink fluids. A cool shower or sponge bath will also help.

**Heat Stroke** is a serious medical condition. It is caused by overexertion in hot environments. Heat stroke is not just the discomfort of feeling too hot. It is a medical emergency that occurs when the body's internal temperature is not cooled enough by sweating. (Sweating is the body's way of getting rid of excess heat.)

### Symptoms of heat stroke include:

- ABSENCE of sweating; hot, red or flushed DRY skin
- Trouble breathing
- Confusion, agitation or strange behavior
- Seizure
- Coma

The symptoms of heat stroke can look like the symptoms of a heart attack. Some people go through heat exhaustion first, but other people get heat stroke very suddenly.

In the event of heat stroke, call 911. While you are waiting for medical help to arrive, move the

person to a cool, shady area. Spray them with cool water or place ice packs under their armpits or on their groin. Remember, heat stroke can be a life-threatening illness.

#### **PREVENTION**

Heat-related illnesses are common among people who work outdoors. There are several things you can do to prevent heat-related illnesses:

- Drink lots of fluids, like water or sports drinks. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which can dehydrate you.
  - Take frequent breaks to drink fluids. Ideally, if you work in a hot area, you should drink one cup of water every 20 minutes.
  - Schedule the hottest work during the early morning or on cooler days.
- Take breaks in a cooler place (air conditioning, if possible. Shade is also good.)
  - Wear light-colored, loose fitting clothing.
  - Wear a hat with a big brim for protection from the sun.
  - Get used to the heat gradually. Time spent in the hottest areas should increase gradually over time to give your body a chance to get used to the heat.
  - Put on sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside. Reapply it throughout the day.

There are no laws that protect workers from hot environments. Your contract may give you some protection. See Appendix D for contract language for your job title.

