Heat Related Illnesses – Toolbox Talk 17

INTRODUCTION

Every year, dozens of workers die and thousands more become ill while working in extreme heat or humid conditions. More than 40 percent of heat-related worker deaths occur in the construction industry, but workers in every field are susceptible. There are a range of heat illnesses and they can affect anyone, regardless of age or physical condition.

THREE TYPES OF HEAT RELATED ILLNESSES

Heat Cramps: Painful cramps in the arms, legs or abdominal muscles caused by the onset dehydration.

- If you have heat cramps, stop the activity and move to a cooler area.
- Drink cool water and gently stretch the affected muscles.

Heat Exhaustion: A milder form of heat related illnesses and occurs from working in high temperatures coupled with inadequate fluid intake.

- Warning signs include heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea/vomiting and fainting.
- The victim's skin may feel pale and moist with rapid heart rate and high blood pressure.
- If untreated, heat exhaustion may transition into heat stroke.
- Drink plenty of liquids such as water and sports drinks to replace electrolytes.
- In extreme temperatures, more frequent breaks may be necessary to reduce the likelihood of heat related illness.

Heat Stroke: A serious condition that if untreated by emergency medical care could result in death.

- Warning signs include pale dry skin with rapid heart rate, difficulty breathing, disorientation, agitation, confusion, fainting, strange behavior, seizures and coma.
- Contact Emergency Medical Services and start to cool the victim by placing ice under the armpits and groin areas.
- Keep the victim in a cool place and fan them until emergency medical assistance arrives.

HOW CAN HEAT RELATED ILLNESS BE PREVENTED?

Heat-related illnesses can be prevented. Important ways to reduce heat exposure and the risk of heat-related illness include engineering controls, such as air conditioning and ventilation, that make the work environment cooler, and work practices such as work/rest cycles, drinking water often, and providing an opportunity for workers to build up a level of tolerance to working in the heat. Employers should include these prevention steps in worksite training and plans. Also, it's important to know and look out for the symptoms of heat-related illness in yourself and others during hot weather. Plan for an emergency and know what to do — **acting quickly can save lives**!

Heat Index	Risk Level	Protective Measures
Less than 91°F	Lower (Caution)	Basic heat safety and planning
91°F to 103°F	Moderate	Implement precautions and heighten awareness
103°F to 115°F	High	Additional precautions to protect workers
Greater than 115°F	Very High to Extreme	Triggers even more aggressive protective measures