

Construction Risk Advisor



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Protecting Workers in Summer Conditions

As summertime approaches, it's important to ensure your employees will be properly protected at the construction site. After all, summer is often the hottest season of the year, typically accompanied by surging temperatures and increased humidity levels. Such weather conditions can greatly increase the risk of your employees experiencing numerous complications on the job—especially heat-related illnesses (e.g., heat stress and heat stroke). In fact, OSHA estimates that thousands of workers sustain these illnesses every year. What's worse, severe cases of heat-related illnesses can be fatal.

With these risks in mind, consider these tips to keep your employees safe while they work outside this summer:

- **Require appropriate clothing.** Instruct employees to wear lightweight, lightly colored and loose-fitting clothing to prevent overheating concerns. Encourage your staff to wear wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses to protect their faces from excess sun exposure. Employees should refrain from wearing clothing items that could get entangled in machinery or that are incompatible with necessary personal protective equipment.
- **Minimize dehydration and fatigue.** Keeping your employees fully hydrated and energized while working outdoors is critical to mitigating heat-related illnesses. As such, be sure to provide plenty of cool drinking water at the jobsite and allow for routine water breaks in air-conditioned or shaded areas. In addition, employees should be encouraged to eat healthy snacks before their shifts to boost their energy levels. Further, arrange employees' schedules and job tasks in a way that limits their time spent working in direct sunlight, as prolonged sun exposure can quickly contribute to fatigue.
- **Allow time for acclimatization.** According to OSHA, between 50% and 70% of employee fatalities stemming from heat-related illnesses were partially caused by a lack of acclimatization. This term refers to the process of building tolerance to a new environment. To adequately acclimate your employees to the summer heat, gradually increase their workloads and allow for more frequent breaks as temperatures rise. Only allow workers to conduct tasks requiring heavy labor during the coolest parts of the workday (if possible)—that is, before 10 a.m. and after 3 p.m.
- **Provide proper training.** Educate your employees on symptoms of heat-related illnesses (e.g., headaches, dizziness, confusion, cramps and vomiting). Have them tell a supervisor and go to an air-conditioned or shaded area if they experience any symptoms. Supervisors should be instructed to call 911 if an employee's symptoms worsen or they lose consciousness.

For additional industry-specific guidance, contact us today.

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