



Keep Your (Employees) Cool This Summer

Insights

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Last year, some parts of the country experienced the hottest summer on record. This year may well be record breaking as well, at least in some parts of the country. Keeping employees safe and cool during the next four months should be of paramount importance for all business owners and employers.

Know The Risks

While the obvious solution to heat-related injuries is to stay in an air-conditioned environment, many workers don't have that option on a regular basis. Heat can sneak up on even the most prepared worker, which is why employees need to have a solid understanding of the dangers of working outside and how to recognize the signs of heat-related illness.

Working in environments that expose employees to high temperatures and humidity, direct sun exposure, indoor radiant heat sources (ovens, hot manufacturing processes, etc.), limited air movement, and which require physical exertion, often pose the greatest risks for heat exhaustion, heatstroke and other high heat related injuries.

Not drinking enough fluids, lack of personal protective equipment or clothing, certain medications, physical condition, lack of recent exposure (not acclimatized), and advanced age (65+) are also potential risk factors. Workers should discuss their individual risk factors with their healthcare provider and make sure their employers are aware of any health issues that would prevent them from working in severe temperature environments.

Watch For Warning Signs

Heat-related illnesses range from heat rash to heatstroke and can often lead to serious medical conditions or even death. Symptoms can include; skin irritation, muscle cramps, headache, dizziness, heavy sweating, nausea or vomiting, and weakness or confusion. At its worst, victims of heatstroke may lose consciousness and/or suffer seizures.

Employees and supervisors should have a clear understanding of the warning signs that often accompany a heat related injury. It is also good to have an exact protocol in place, should someone fall ill while working in extreme heat conditions.

Offer Solutions

The first line of defense is making sure that your employees have the necessary tools in place in order to stay safe and cool, should they need to be exposed to the elements for a long period of time. OSHA currently offers heat safety posters and a new “Heat Safety Tools” app that both employers and employees can utilize. Work with your operations team to ensure that there is always ample amounts of cool and clean drinking water available and remind workers to drink it. In order to prevent over-hydration, educate workers on the benefits of drinking small amounts of water throughout the day vs. chugging one large serving every few hours.

If scheduling allows, gradually increase worker exposure to high temperatures so that they can become more acclimatized to the heat. In order to prevent injuries, provide ample recovery breaks in well shaded or air-conditioned areas and whenever feasible, reschedule work for cooler parts of the day.

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