

## HEAT STRESS POLICY

### Working in hot temperatures

#### **Why is working in the heat bad for your health?**

Human beings need to maintain a constant body temperature if they are to stay healthy. Working in high temperatures will induce heat stress when more heat is absorbed into the body than can be dissipated out. Heat illness such as prickly heat, fainting from heat exhaustion or heat cramps are visible signs that people are working in unbearable heat. In the most severe cases, the body's temperature control system breaks down altogether and body temperature rises rapidly. This is heat stroke, which can be fatal.

#### **Warning signs of heat exhaustion are:**

- Clammy Skin
- Confusion
- Light-headedness
- Fainting
- Slurred speech
- Nausea
- Rapid pulse
- Vomiting
- Weakness
- Short temper
- Fatigue
- Loss of concentration

#### **Symptoms that indicate heat stroke include:**

- Staggering walk
- Mental confusion
- Hot skin
- Temperature rise (yet person may feel chilled)
- Convulsions
- Unconsciousness
- Incoherence
- Deliriousness

#### **Is there an upper temperature limit at which workers should stop work?**

Section 19 of the Work Health & Safety Act has a legal duty to ensure the Workplace Health & Safety of workers whilst at work. If workers are suffering from any of the above symptoms, then it is clear that PCBU is not complying with the law. Section 40 of the Work Health & Safety regulation 2011 binds the PCBU to comply with sub section (F). The principle Contractor must ensure compliance under Section 314 of the Work Health and Safety Regulations.

#### **What helps to prevent heat stress?**

It is obviously more difficult for the PCBU to control the environment for outdoor work, than for indoor work. However, if work has to be done outdoors then PCBU must be responsible in taking steps that are available to protect workers.

#### **These include:**

- Providing canopies or awnings over sections of the site where work is currently being carried out or at least over the water cooler gathering points, to shield workers from the ultra-violet rays of the sun, as well as from the direct heat of the sun.
- Providing regular rest breaks. A ten minute break every hour, in a cooler area, helps the body to cool off, especially where the work is hard, physical work. The length of the break should be increased if the temperature is very high. As a practical guideline, the following measures can be followed in most workplaces: When temperatures are expected to be greater than 30 degrees it is recommended that workers work an eight hour day.

Temperature	Rest Period
30 to 32°	10 Minutes
32 to 35°	15 Minutes
More than 35°	At least 30 Minutes

- Providing air-conditioned sheds. These must obviously be near each area where work is being done, or break time will be spent walking to and from the shed or. Also, the nearer the shed, the more likely it is to be used.
- Provision of cold (non-alcoholic) drinks. Frequent small drinks of cooled water will help replace the water lost to your body through sweat, before dehydration begins. This is better than infrequent large drinks. Again, the cold water supplies should be near each working position, to encourage frequent drinks. Large drink vessels distributed through the site to supplement the hard wired water coolers will also be a requirement in hot weather.

**Alcoholic drinks should not be taken as replacement fluids. Alcohol stimulates the body to eliminate fluids, and will increase your risk of dehydration. For example, if you drink one can of beer, you will lose more than that volume of urine.**

- Salt tablets should not be taken - more water will be required by the body to help it get rid of the salt - this will increase the amount of work the kidneys must do and increase the risk of dehydration. Salt tablets also increase the risk of high blood pressure. Drinking water will not give you stomach cramps, as some people believe.

***What action should be taken if someone has symptoms of heat illness?***

- First take the sufferer to a cooler area (for example, an air-conditioned shed, first aid room).
- Then remove excess clothing (hard hat, boots, and shirt).
- Give water to drink, if conscious.
- Allow the person to rest if they are suffering from heat exhaustion
- If the person is suffering from heat stroke they should be cooled with water, cold compresses, and/or rapid fanning. A person suffering from heat stroke should be taken to a medical facility for further cooling and monitoring of body functions.

***Workplace action to prevent heat stress:***

- Ask workers exposed to high temperatures if they find conditions too hot or have any
- heat stress symptoms have these comments minuted in the site safety meetings and tool box meetings.
- Ask management to measure and record the temperature regularly throughout the year, preferably with an automatic Wet-Bulb Globe Temperature Instrument, or at least with instruments that measure dry temperature and humidity. Safety Reps have a legal right to these results. Put all of your requests to management in writing.
- Persuade workers to put all incidents of high temperatures and symptoms suffered into the Accident Book.
- Do accidents happen more frequently during high temperature conditions? Is there more sick absence during these conditions? Safety Reps should monitor these periods for a potential survey of the membership.

- Demand that management bring in ventilation consultants to (re)design and install air conditioning or cool air providers, or insulation of radiant heat sources. Your union will be able to help you with these arrangements.
- Negotiate exposure reduction by frequent rests away from the source of heat and job rotation.
- Demand that the PCBU provide suitable clothing and footwear - clothing which increases body heat or prevents sweat evaporating is not suitable (for example, nylon).
- Arrange for regular medical checks of employees particularly of blood pressure.
- Demand information and training for all employees on the need for adequate water, recognition of heat symptoms, acclimatization to heat, exposure build-up for new workers after holidays and types of work which increase heat hazard. This is a legal entitlement under section 19 of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Ensure that first-aiders are trained in the recognition of heat symptoms and first aid treatment of heat stress.
- If you are getting no response from management, consider calling in the Work Place Health and Safety Inspector who may encourage the PCBU to take action. Retain copies of your records and written requests to management to show the inspector.

**REMEMBER:  
HEAT STRESS IS A  
MEDICAL EMERGENCY.  
DON'T TAKE CHANCES!**

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ABN: 24 502 631 846**