

OSHA - Employers Have A Duty To Help Prevent Heat-related Illnesses

July 13, 2012 | [Employee Health Issues, Currents - Employment Law](#)

Although the oppressive heat wave that affected much of the country is behind us for now, as the summer rolls on we can expect that additional hot weather will continue to pose challenges for those who work outdoors or in locations where heat can build up to extreme levels. Prevention of heat-related illnesses can be even more of a priority with temperatures in excess of 100 degrees that cause the heat index to soar to potentially dangerous levels. To help employers anticipate issues that can arise when the temperatures rise, [OSHA](#) is in the midst of a public relations campaign to [raise awareness](#) of the need to protect workers from the heat.

OSHA also is referring employers to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's [heat watch page](#) for further assistance in preventing heat illness in outdoor workers. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also is providing heat-related resources for businesses and communities to prepare for and respond to heat waves with its [Excessive Heat Events Guidebook](#), accessible at its website.

The agency's campaign notes that the general duty clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) requires employers to provide a workplace that is free from "recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm" to employees. For employers working outdoors in the heat, or indoors in other extreme temperature environments (i.e. a foundry), OSHA recommends having a Heat Stress Management Program. This program would include: a) a training program for employees and supervisors about the effects of heat stress, b) implementing new procedures for an acclimation program and additional water breaks, and c) a program for responding to heat-related emergencies.

OSHA's campaign of "Water. Rest. Shade" is an important message, but it is also a cautionary tale as it reaffirms the "recognized hazard" of heat illnesses. Employers may be subject to citations and fines for failing to take appropriate measures during the extreme heat.

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