

Safe Work Instruction

Heat Stress



INTRODUCTION:

Heat stress and heat exhaustion can occur when working in excessive heat particularly in conjunction with other external factors such as high humidity, radiant heat, direct exposure to the sun and lack of air movement.

If heat stress is high enough the body needs cooling mechanisms such as convection, radiation and evaporation to maintain normal function.

In very hot conditions sweat evaporation is the only means by which the body can maintain its temperature range for healthy functioning and, large amounts of salt and water can be lost during this process which must be replaced to prevent dehydration.

Conditions such as fatigue, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat stroke of ranging severity may occur if these cooling mechanisms are insufficient.

WORK INSTRUCTION:

To avoid the adverse effects of heat stress:

- Make sure to drink regular and adequate quantities of water;
- Alter work schedule so that heavier work is done during cooler periods;
- Reduce radiant heat by providing shade or shielding where possible;
- Improve air circulation;
- Wear suitable clothing and head protection;
- Ensure workers are fit and acclimatised for the tasks assigned and are not affected by medication that will impair their ability to cope with heat stress;
- Allow for regular rest periods in cooler environments and, self regulation of work if fatigue, discomfort or other symptoms occur.

To treat the adverse effects of heat stress:

- Assist the person out of the heat and, rest in the coolest available place;
- Encourage the sipping of cool (not cold) fluids;
- Seek medical assistance.

If heat stroke is suspected (decreased sweating, high temperature, hot dry skin and even confusion and loss of consciousness):

- Cool the body as quickly as possible (soak the victims clothing in cold water and increase air movement by fanning);
- Seek urgent medical assistance.