



STATEWIDE'S EDGE

Giving public entities the edge on addressing their safety issues

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STATEWIDE INSURANCE FUND LOSS CONTROL FACT SHEET - #2010-05 **Stay Smart to Keep Cool**

With summer's high temperatures, the risk of heat-related injuries in the workplace increases dramatically. If left untreated, severe, permanent health damage or death can result. More often than not, no action is taken until the situation has become critical and progressed to a point beyond treatment. **Heat stress** includes a series of conditions resulting from overheating. This can include heat-related rash, cramps, exhaustion and stroke. **Symptoms range from profuse sweating to dizziness, nausea, confusion and inability to concentrate, cessation of sweating and collapse.** Heat stress can be induced by high temperatures, heavy workloads and clothing.

Certain employees are more likely to have heat disorders than others. Younger employees and those more physically fit are often less likely to have problems. **Employees with heart, lung or kidney disease or with diabetes, and those on medications, are more likely to experience heat stress problems.** Diet pills, sedatives, tranquilizers, caffeinated drinks and excessive alcohol consumption all can exacerbate heat stress effects.

A heat stress victim often overlooks the signs of heat stress. An employee may at first be confused or unable to concentrate, followed by more severe symptoms such as fainting or collapse. **If heat stress symptoms occur, move the employee to a cool, shaded area and give him or her water. If the employee is not responding, seek medical help immediately.**

The best means of avoiding this serious health issue is through a proactive prevention plan.

Employees should take the following precautions to avoid heat stress:

- Wear light-colored, loose clothing unless working around equipment with moving parts.
- Drink plenty of water. In hot environments, the body requires more water than it takes to satisfy thirst. Drink before becoming thirsty.
- Keep shaded from direct heat where possible. Wear a hat and apply sunscreen.
- Take more frequent breaks.

Supervisors and management can contribute significantly by:

- Using adequate fans for ventilating and cooling a work area. This is especially helpful when employees are required to wear personal protective equipment or are working around hot equipment.
- Allowing time for employees to adjust to summer heat. It often takes two to three weeks for an employee to become acclimated to a hot environment. Employees should be more cautious about heat stress after coming back from vacation, beginning a new job or after the season's first heat wave.
- Adjusting the work schedule. Assign heavier work on cooler days during the cooler part of the day.
- Reducing the workload. Increase the use of equipment on hot days to reduce physical labor. Try to reduce the use of equipment that produces excess heat.
- Establishing a schedule for work and rest periods during hot days.
- Informing employees on how to recognize signs and symptoms of heat stress disorders, and being prepared to give first aid if necessary.