

CFMEU SAFETY GUIDANCE

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

WORKING IN HEAT

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Every employer has a duty of care to “ensure the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace.” This includes ensuring that workers are not exposed to hazardous temperatures.

Between 2005 and 2014, 13 workers died in Australia from being exposed to ‘environmental heat’. As the temperature rises the body becomes less able to cope with the strain which can result in serious health risks such as:

Heat cramps: These are painful cramps in the legs and arm muscles, the back and the stomach. They are due in part to excessive loss of salt during sweating.

Heat rash: Skin rashes over arms, shoulders, and chest and behind the knee often associated with a tingling or prickly feeling are a sign of excessive heat exposure.

Heat exhaustion: This happens when the body loses too much water too quickly. The blood pumped to the skin for cooling purposes depletes the brain of sufficient blood and this can cause fainting. The signs are heavy sweating (clammy skin), vomiting, paleness, dizziness, low temperature, tiredness and a weak pulse.

Heat stroke: This occurs when the body is no longer able to control its internal temperature. Because sweating stops, a high fever results that can lead to damage to organs such as the brain, liver, and kidneys.

If you or others are experiencing any of these symptoms you should seek immediate medical advice. As the temperature rises, the likelihood of workers’ health suffering increases. Early intervention is critical.

Hot temperatures cause discomfort and hazards such as:

- Reduced concentration (and increased likelihood of accidents)
- Increased discomfort in use of protective clothing and equipment
- Aggravation of effects of other hazards, e.g. noise, interface with other work groups, perceived pressure, and frustration
- Aggravation of pre-existing illnesses; and
- Heat stress, exhaustion, and fainting.

Heat discomfort is felt at 30 degrees Celsius and all efforts should be taken by employers to keep temperatures below this level or to provide conditions for outdoor workers that help reduce the effects of seasonal hot conditions where the temperature exceeds 30 degrees.

Control measures to be taken

Employers should monitor weather forecasts and plan work for when temperatures are forecast to reach 37.5 degrees Celsius by:

- Ensuring heavy work or work in exposed areas does not extend beyond the time the temperature is expected to reach 37.5 degrees Celsius
- Toolbox workers in this procedure

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- Conduct and record hydration monitoring
- Facilitate the rehydration of workers identified as dehydrated
- Monitor workers in their crews for signs and symptoms of heat exposure
- Extra consideration needs to be given to workers conducting hot works such as welding or workers handling hot items e.g. steel fixers, riggers, dogmen, scaffolders.
- Avoiding work in areas where workers are exposed to heat e.g. open areas, concrete slabs in open unshaded areas, formwork decks, bondek
- Providing air-conditioned rest rooms
- Changing the rate of work e.g. plan and allow for tasks to take longer than in normal working conditions
- Providing lighter alternative work
- Provide air-circulating fans where practicable
- Provide shade structures where practicable
- Provide constant supplies of cool drinking water

Workers should also monitor each other for signs and symptoms of heat related illness, provide aid to affected workers and report immediately to their supervisor.

When the temperature reaches 30 degrees Celsius ensure a regime of rest breaks in air-conditioned areas with cool drinks is available. To minimise the risks, the temperature needs to be constantly monitored through the nearest relevant BoM weather station.

The following rest breaks in air conditioned areas should apply:

30 to 32 degrees Celsius	10 minutes rest every hour
32 to 35 degrees Celsius	15 minutes rest every hour
35 to 37.5 degrees Celsius	30 minutes rest every hour
37.5 degrees Celsius workers make the work area safe and go home	

The effects of heat are more pronounced if the air quality is poor, for example due to smoke haze. When it is hot and there is smoke haze the body spends energy keeping itself cool and coping with the effects of smoke haze.

Some people may have physical or medical health conditions, making them more susceptible to hot conditions.

Hydration

Thirst is not a reliable guide for dehydration. It's essential to drink especially when working or exercising in the heat. Drink water, not energy or sports drinks.

Urine that is light yellow is a good indication that you are getting enough fluid.

First Aid

If someone is suffering from heat stress they must immediately report to management and be given first aid. This includes resting in cooler areas, keeping the skin wet and fanning to improve evaporation and cooling of the skin. If their condition does not improve call an ambulance.

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