The Temperature is Rising

This is the time of year we look forward to warmer temperatures, and the sun responds with heating up our day. Those who were laid off for the winter look forward to getting back to work. In other areas, the jackets come off and they enjoy a warmer day. Eventually it gets hot and humid, and that is when it can become dangerous. In 2016 alone, 39 workers died and 3,310 were injured from environmental heat exposure.[1]

The dangers of heat

Preparing for and handling working in heat and humidity can provide protection from potentially deadly conditions. Your body is designed to cool itself and normally does a good job. But, if you're exposed to extreme heat for too long, sweat a lot and don't rehydrate, your cooling system may fail. If that happens, watch out! A heat-related illness can start slowly—you may not even realize it's happening—but it can quickly get worse if it's not treated.

Heat-related illnesses and warning signs[2]

- Basically, **heat cramps** are Charley horses and can be an early warning sign of heat-related illness.
- **Heat exhaustion** symptoms include increased body temperature (as high as 104°F) and cold, clammy skin. Untreated, it can lead to heatstroke.
- **Heatstroke** is life-threatening and can cause brain damage, organ failure, or even death. Body temperature goes over 104°F. The victim may stop sweating even though his/her skin may be hot, and could also become confused or irritable. Medical attention is critical.

Major warning signs of heat-related illness include:

- Muscle cramps
- Nausea or vomiting
- Weakness
- Headache
- Dizziness/feeling light-headed
- Confusion

Avoiding the dangers of too much heat

Not everyone reacts to too much heat exposure the same way nor experiences all the classic symptoms of heat-related illness. If your employees ever work in hot conditions, they should know the related risks and preventive measures so they can protect themselves. Practicing basic precautions can help make working in hot weather more bearable and less dangerous.

- Pace yourself when working in the heat—don't overdo it.
- Hydrate with plenty of water or sports drinks, but no alcohol or caffeine.
- Dress appropriately—light-colored, lightweight, loose fitting clothing, including a wide-brimmed hat, if possible.
- Stay out of the midday sun whenever possible. Do the harder work during the cooler parts of the day. Take breaks in the shade.
- Wear sunscreen. A sunburn makes it harder for your body to cool itself.
- Certain medical conditions or medications can make you more vulnerable to over-heating.
- Keep an eye on co-workers. If someone is showing any of the symptoms of heat illness, notify your supervisor immediately.

For more information on environment heat exposure, contact the Risk Management Resource Center or your local Federated representative.

[1] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics; https://data.bls.gov/gqt/InitialPage. Accessed 4/11/2018

[2] For more thorough information on topics in this article, visit the Mayo Clinic website; http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20048167?pg=1.

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