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Managing Heat Stress and Outdoor Work in WA

A Practical Employer Guide to Summer Workplace Safety

Summer conditions in Western Australia can create additional workplace safety risks through heat, sun exposure, humidity, physical workload and hot indoor environments.
Employers should plan practical controls to protect workers, support wellbeing and keep operations running safely.



Understanding Heat Stress

1 Understanding Workplace Heat Risks

High temperatures and humidity
Heat and humidity affect the body's ability to cool itself and increase the risk of heat-related illness.

Physical workload and heat exposure
Strenuous work increases body temperature and can lead to dehydration and fatigue.

Direct sunlight and radiant heat
Sun exposure and heat from surfaces or equipment can raise core body temperature.

Poor ventilation and indoor heat
Stagnant air and heat generated by machinery or processes can cause indoor spaces to become hazardous.

Clothing and personal protective equipment
Heavy, non-breatable clothing or PPE can trap heat and reduce the body's ability to cool down.

2 Recognising Heat-Related Illness

Dehydration
Early signs: thirst, dry mouth, dark urine, headache, dizziness.

Heat cramps
Early signs: muscle pain or spams, usually in the legs or abdomen.

Heat exhaustion
Early signs: heavy sweating, weakness, nausea, headache, rapid pulse, dizziness or fainting.

Heat stroke
Signs: high body temperature, hot and dry skin, confusion, loss of coordination, seizures or unconsciousness.

Suspected heat stroke is an emergency.

Call Triple Zero (000) immediately.

Practical Prevention and Control Measures

3 Managing Outdoor Work



Schedule work during cooler periods

Plan tasks for early morning or later in the day where possible to reduce heat exposure.



Provide shaded work and rest areas

Ensure access to shaded areas or temporary shelters close to work locations.



Appropriate sun-protective clothing

Provide lightweight, long-sleeved clothing, broad-brimmed hats and sunglasses where required.



Sunscreen and UV protection

Supply broad-spectrum sunscreen and encourage regular application throughout the day.



Safe work planning

Assess heat risks during planning and adjust tasks, pace and breaks to suit conditions.

4 Water, Rest and Recovery



Access to clean drinking water

Provide easy access to clean, cool drinking water at all times.



Regular hydration

Encourage workers to drink water regularly, not just when thirsty.



Suitable rest breaks

Allow regular rest breaks in shaded or cool areas to reduce heat strain.



Cool recovery areas

Provide air-conditioned or well-ventilated areas where workers can cool down.



Monitoring workers during hot conditions

Monitor workers for signs of heat stress and encourage early reporting of symptoms.

5 Managing Indoor Heat

Indoor environments can still present heat risks, particularly in enclosed or high-activity workplaces.

Common environments include:

- Commercial kitchens
- Warehouses
- Workshops
- Manufacturing environments



Ventilation and cooling arrangements

- Ensure effective ventilation to promote
- air movement.
- Use fans, cooling systems or natural ventilation where appropriate.
- Maintain and service cooling equipment regularly.
- Minimise heat build-up from equipment, lighting and processes.

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Employer Responsibilities and Summer Planning

6 Supporting Workers

Acclimatisation

Support new and returning workers to gradually adjust to working in heat.

Worker consultation

Consult with workers about heat risks, controls and practical improvements.

Additional support where individual circumstances require it

Consider health conditions, medication, age and other factors that may increase heat risk.

Supervisor awareness

Ensure supervisors can recognise signs of heat stress and know how to respond.

Reporting symptoms and concerns

Encourage workers to speak up about symptoms or concerns without hesitation.

7 Preparing for Heatwaves

Monitor weather forecasts and warnings

Keep informed of forecast conditions and potential extreme heat events..

Review workplace risk assessments

Review and update risk assessments to reflect seasonal and site-specific heat risks.

Adjust or suspend high-risk work where necessary

Modify work practices or reschedule to reduce heat during extreme heat conditions.

Review emergency procedures

Ensure heat-related emergencies are addressed in workplace procedures and plans.

Monitor remote and isolated workers

Maintain regular contact and ensure access to water, shade and rest. opportunities.

8 Employee Action Plan

1. Identify heat-related hazards

Identify heat sources and situations that could harm workers.

2. Assess workplace risks

Assess who is at risk and how heat may affect their health and safety.

3. Implement appropriate controls

Implement practical controls to eliminate or minimise heat risk.

4. Train and work with workers

Provide training and consult workers on heat risks and controls.

5. Monitor and review controls

Monitor effectiveness and review controls regularly, especially before summer.

For practical support with HR consulting, workplace relations and compliance, contact WCA Solutions.