



Weekly Safety Meeting

Heat is Coming

As spring turns into summer and brings on hot weather, we should all be aware of some tips to prevent heat stress. Remember, physical activity at high temperatures can directly affect health and indirectly be the cause of accidents.

Statistics show a rise in temperature can affect the workplace in a negative way. The increased number of injuries and illnesses that crop up during the spring and summer seasons reflect this fact.

Heat stress is a common, yet often ignored, hazard in the workplace. While it is widely recognized that heat stress can pose a serious health hazard to workers, employers may not realize that working in hot environments also increases safety risks.

Research shows that working in hot environments is linked with lower mental alertness and physical performance, and consequently more injuries. Factor in elevated body temperature and physical discomfort, and it's easy to see how workers can divert their attention from hazardous tasks and overlook common safety procedures.

Heat illness is dangerous, but it doesn't strike without warning. It's usually preceded by signs and symptoms, but because supervisors and workers aren't always alert to these signs, they may lose the chance to help themselves or their co-workers. They may do something that makes their situation even worse, for example, drinking a couple of cans of beer when they are feeling overheated.

Chronicle of a Preventable Heat Stress Death

The story starts in New Mexico in the spring of 2008. Anthony Dalton and Ronald Morrissey are trained boilermakers and good friends. They decided to take a job in Albuquerque repairing pipes in a paper mill. Here is a chronicle of what came next:

May 20, 2008: Dalton and Morrissey report for their first day of work. The temperatures outside are high for May – 94°F and 35% humidity. It's even hotter in the mill where chemicals are heated in enclosed spaces, especially on the scaffolds where Dalton and Morrissey are working. Nobody tells them anything about the dangers of heat stress. Later, the contractor will testify that he assumed that trained boilermakers would know all about heat stress. It turns out to be a tragically flawed assumption.

Dalton and Morrissey work all day in the heat. Dalton starts experiencing fatigue. It is the first warning of danger, but since neither man knows anything about the signs of heat stress, it goes unrecognized.

May 22, 2008: The outdoor temperature has climbed to 99°F. Humidity is at 33%. The heat and hard work in the mill continue. Dalton and Morrissey work the entire day. Dalton is getting worse. When the two get back to their motel after work, Dalton starts experiencing muscle cramps. He is exhausted. He drinks a beer, not realizing that the last thing somebody in his condition should do is drink alcohol. He passes out on the bathroom floor of the motel room.

May 22, 2008: It's even hotter today-101°F. Dalton is still exhausted but decides to drag himself to work. He spends the morning inside one of the tanks helping to build a scaffold. He is in big trouble. After an afternoon break, he tells the supervisor that he is just too exhausted to go back to work. He sits on the floor with his back against the base of a column. When the shift ends, he can barely stand up. He is incoherent. He stumbles about 300 feet and finally collapses. Even now, nobody knows what's wrong. An ambulance takes Dalton to the hospital, but it is too late. Dalton dies of heat stroke the very next day.

The Moral

Perhaps the saddest part of the death of Anthony Dalton is that his death could have been prevented. There were plenty of warning signs:

- Fatigue;
- Body cramps;
- Passing out on the bathroom floor in his motel room;
- Extreme fatigue again the next day; and
- Weakness and inability to stand, etc.

Anybody aware of the signs of heat stress would have recognized what was going on and acted in response while there was still time. Tragically, because not one of his workers or supervisors with whom Dalton worked around had any education on heat stress, every opportunity to save his life was missed!

Summary

Recognizing the symptoms of heat stress is very important, particularly since the victims may not realize what is happening to them. If you work alone in a hot environment, develop a "buddy system" so someone will check in on you periodically to consider potential signs of heat stress illness.

Preventing heat stress is a matter of controlling the factors that cause it. Use precautions and don't hesitate to seek assistance if you suspect heat stress. Your life depends on it!

***FHEAT STRESS CAN KILL...TAKE TIME TO COOL DOWN...AND PROPERLY
HYDRATE!!***

Safety Meeting Sign-In Sheet

Supervisor:	Subject:
Location:	Date:
Conducted By:	Trainer Signature:

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