



RISK ALERT

August 10, 2023

TCRMF Risk Alert

Heat Stress

The Texas temperatures during the summer have always been scorching. This year is exceptional. This puts our employees at risk for heat related stress that could turn fatal. It is vital that employees adhere to safe practices while performing work outside, so they keep themselves cool and hydrated throughout the day.

Exposure to these extreme temperatures can cause heat illness, heat exhaustion and/or heat stroke. Risk factors of heat stress are high temperatures and humidity, no breeze or wind, intense physical labor, no recent exposure to hot environments, low liquid intake and waterproof clothing. When these risk factors are present, it is important that the employees understand the different types of symptoms and treatments. When symptoms are observed, the individual is experiencing heat exhaustion or a heat stroke, which has the potential to be fatal.

Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Cramping
- Weakness
- Wet skin
- Irritability or confusion
- Thirst
- Nausea or vomiting

Symptoms of Heat Stroke

- Confused or unable to think clearly
- Passing out or collapsing
- Seizures
- No signs of sweating

There are steps you can take to reduce the likelihood of these symptoms occurring. First, discuss the risk factors and signs of symptoms with the employees regularly throughout the blistering summer days. This should occur weekly (daily, if necessary) or when jobsite locations change. Continually remind employees to wear light-colored, loose clothing and sunscreen. Loose clothing will allow air to flow and cool the skin. Sunburns will dehydrate the skin and could keep pores from exuding sweat. Sweat is the bodies mechanism to regulating body temperature. Second, provide lots of *cool* water for the work crews. At least one pint per hour is needed. Caffeine and alcohol should be avoided. A hangover will likely bring on symptoms faster. Available water should be monitored throughout the day. Third, designate an employee to monitor conditions, maintain the cold-water source and protect employees who are at risk of heat stress. This designated employee needs to know the signs of heat illness/stroke. Lastly, use mechanical equipment, where possible, to limit physical exertion.

You might also consider modifying work schedules to reduce work during the hottest part of the day. You also want to ensure employees are working with at least one other person, if not more. Another best practice is to arrange for frequent break periods with water under shade or in air-conditioned areas, like inside a running vehicle. For new employees, gradually increase their workloads and allow for more frequent breaks until they are acclimated to the work environment. When heat indexes approach 110+°, we encourage shutting down non-essential activities.

If an employee shows signs of heat stroke:

- Immediately call a supervisor or 911 for help
- Have someone stay with the employee until help arrives
- Move the individual to a shaded/cooler area
- Remove outer clothing
- Fan and mist the individual with water
- Apply ice bags or cold towels, if possible
- Provide cool drinking water, if able to drink

Fall is just around the corner! However, it is important that employees approach this last couple of months or so with a heightened awareness to the health risks they face. Discussions with your employees with outside exposure is a great first step.

In summary, know the signs of heat-related illness. Frequent breaks with cold water and shade are the next steps to mitigating the risks. Finally, assigning an

individual to monitor conditions, maintain water levels and watch for displays of symptoms of employees is an added layer that can really ensure everyone is safe.

The Fund can help you with identifying heat related risks and developing plans to reduce the risks. For more information, contact Jeremy Wade, Loss Control Manager at jeremy.wade@sedgwick.com.

OSHA's Heat Stress Quick Card can be accessed here: [Protecting Workers from Heat Stress \(osha.gov\)](https://www.osha.gov/heat-stress).

Use the links below for more information and tools

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