

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Beat the Heat – Keep it Cool

Summer is here! Weekends are filled with cook-outs, baseball and water sports. The weather that allows us to enjoy outdoor activities can endanger those who work in warm environments – both outside and inside.

In a hot environment, or during vigorous physical activity, the body will rid itself of excess heat through sweating, increased heart rate and dilation of blood vessels. When sweat evaporates from the skin, you begin to cool off. When blood vessels dilate, blood is brought to the skin surface to release heat. Sunburn slows the skin's ability to cool itself.

A statement frequently heard this time of year is “It’s not the heat, it’s the humidity.” A more accurate phrase would be “it’s not the heat, it’s the heat index”. Heat and humidity combine to form the heat index, which is simply a way to measure how the air affects the human body. Higher temperatures and higher relative humidity equals a higher heat index. Understanding the heat index can help you understand the potential dangers to your body and how to deal with them.

Catch it Early

- Supervisors should watch for warning signs of heat illness among workers.
- Make adjustments to workload distribution to reduce the chance of heat stress.
- Eat light – the more calories you take in, the more body heat you produce.
- Drink plenty of fluids before work and throughout the day.
- Choose appropriate clothing – cotton allows skin to breathe and absorbs sweat.

- Light colors help to reflect heat and sunlight.
- The use of personal protective equipment may contribute to a quicker increase in a workers’ metabolic heat load, necessitating more frequent breaks.

Heat illnesses, especially in summer, are the consequence of not recognizing the warning signs on the job. Hot conditions don’t have to be dangerous if you watch for the warning signs and get cooperation from workers to prevent heat-related illness.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.