SFM 5-MINUTE SOLUTIONS

A safety talk for successful injury prevention

Heat stress

Introduction:

Heat illnesses can occur when you are in hot environments and fail to take in enough fluids, salts or both. The most severe heat illness is heat stroke, a life-threatening condition. Heat stroke happens when the body fails to regulate its core temperature. At this point, the body stops cooling itself through perspiration and can't get rid of excess heat. The end result can be death if the body temperature isn't lowered!

Hazards:

Heat stress includes:

- **Heat Cramps**—Painful muscle spasms most likely in the arms, legs and abdominal area.
- **Heat Rash**—Cluster of red bumps on skin, usually on neck, upper chest, elbow creases and groin
- **Heat Exhaustion**—Symptoms include profuse sweating, headaches, extreme weakness or fatigue, dizziness, fast pulse, rapid breathing and nausea or vomiting.
- **Heat or Sun Stroke**—Symptoms include a very high body temperature (104 degrees F or higher); mental confusion, slurred speech; hot, dry, red skin or profuse sweating; convulsions; and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help immediately and keep the person cool with fans, ice and water until help arrives.

Safe procedures:

- Adjust yourself to the heat through short exposure periods followed by longer exposure until your body is acclimated to the heat. It may take up to 14 days.
- Drink lots of liquid to replenish the fluid that your body is losing through sweating. Drink water to stay hydrated (about 1 cup every 15 minutes), and electrolyte drinks (Sport Drinks) to replace salt. Don't wait to drink until you're thirsty and avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages.
- Do not ignore possible symptoms of heat stress. If you feel very hot, dizzy, nauseous or if your muscles cramp, stop, hydrate, rest and cool off in the shade or air-conditioned area.
- Wear light-colored and loose-fitting clothes. Cotton breathes better than synthetic fabrics.
- Schedule work activities during the coolest parts of the day.
- Take the time to rest and cool down.

In conclusion:

Heat stress is serious. If an employee appears to be suffering from heat stress illness, remove him or her from the heat and provide a cool, shaded place to rest. If the employee is disoriented or non-responsive, call for medical attention immediately.

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