Fatality File: Tragic Death of Anthony Dalton Underscores Need for Heat Stress Training

Working in high heat and humidity is more than uncomfortable. It can also be deadly. Heat stress is especially lethal when it sneaks up on victims. That should never happen. Heat stress doesn't strike without warning. But when you don't make supervisors and workers aware of the warning signs, you leave them vulnerable. Worse, you empower them to do things that actually increase the danger. Here's a real-life story of how lack of education led directly to a heat stress death.

Chronicle of a Preventable Heat Stress Death

Anthony Dalton and Ronald Morrissey are trained boilermakers and best friends who've decided to leave their native Newfoundland to take a job in a New Brunswick paper mill.

May 20

Dalton and Morrissey report for their first day of work. The temperatures outside are high for May—34.4° C/94° F, and 35% humidity. It's even hotter in the mill where chemicals are heated in enclosed spaces. Dalton and Morrissey work inside all day on scaffolds. Dalton feels fatigue. It's the first warning sign. But they don't recognize it because nobody gave them any information about heat stress hazards. The contractor will later testify later that he just assumed trained boilermakers would know all about heat stress. It turns out to be a tragically flawed assumption.

May 21

The outdoor temperature has climbed to 37.2° C/99° F. Humidity is at 33%. Dalton and Morrissey work the entire day. Dalton is getting worse. When the two get back to their motel after work, Dalton experiences muscle cramps. Exhausted, he passes out on the bathroom floor. He drinks a beer, not recognizing that alcohol will dehydrate him when he desperately needs to rehydrate.

May 22

It's even hotter at 38.3° C/101° F. Dalton manages to drag himself to work. He spends the morning inside a tank building a scaffold. After afternoon break, he tells the supervisor that he's too exhausted to continue. He sits on the floor with his back against the base of a column. When the shift ends, he can barely stand up. He's incoherent. He stumbles about 100 yards and collapses. Even now, nobody knows what's

wrong. He’s rushed to the hospital in an ambulance.

May 23

Anthony Dalton dies of heat stroke in his hospital bed.

Takeaway: Implement a Heat Stress Training Program for Your Workers

Perhaps the saddest part of the death of Anthony Dalton is that it could have been prevented. There was ample warning: Dalton’s fatigue, the cramps, his passing out on the bathroom floor, etc. Anybody attuned to the signs of heat stress would have recognized what was going on and acted while there was still time. Tragically, because none of the mill’s workers or supervisors had any education on heat stress, they missed every opportunity to save him.

Don’t let what happened to Anthony Dalton happen to your own workers!!

Implement a heat stress training program to educate workers and supervisors about:

- The different kinds of heat illnesses, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.
- How to spot the symptoms, risk factors, danger signs, and symptoms of each type of heat illness.
- How to respond to those signs and symptoms.
- The first-aid procedures for heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- Workers’ own responsibilities to protect themselves and their co-workers against heat stress.
- Safe work procedures for working in extreme heat and humidity.
- The dangers of using drugs, including therapeutic ones, and alcohol in hot work environments.
- The use of protective clothing and PPE for heat stress.
- The purpose of acclimatization, environmental and medical surveillance programs and why workers should participate in them.