

Protecting Workers From Heat Illness Stats and Facts



FACTS

1. Although illness from exposure to heat is preventable, every year, thousands become sick from occupational heat exposure, and some cases are fatal. Most outdoor fatalities, occur in the first few days of working in warm or hot environments because the body needs to build a tolerance to the heat gradually over time. The process of building tolerance is called heat acclimatization. Lack of acclimatization represents a major risk factor for fatal outcomes.
2. Occupational risk factors for heat illness include heavy physical activity, warm or hot environmental conditions, lack of acclimatization, and wearing clothing that holds in body heat.
3. Hazardous heat exposure can occur indoors or outdoors, and can occur during any season if the conditions are right, not only during heat waves.
4. Working in a hot environment can trigger ailments that include heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heatstroke – considered a medical emergency. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include feeling faint or dizzy; excessive sweating; cool, pale, clammy skin; nausea or vomiting; rapid, weak pulse; and muscle cramps.

STATS

- Some statistical approaches estimate that more than 1,300 deaths per year in the United States are due to extreme heat.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 783 workers in the US died and more than 69,000 workers suffered serious injuries due to heat exposure on the job, though labor advocates argue the real numbers are even higher due to widespread under-reporting and employers misclassifying worker deaths as non-work-related.
- High temperatures can be dangerous to people at work and can lead to injuries, illnesses, and even death. Exposure to environmental heat led to 37 work-related deaths and 2,830 nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses.
- Nearly 90 % (33) of the deaths occurred from June through September.

Workers in transportation and material moving occupations were involved in 720 of the nonfatal injury and illness cases involving days away from work.