

RISK ALERT

HEAT STRESS CAN KILL

IT'S THE LAW!

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, paragraphs 9(2)(b)(c)(d), employers are responsible for responding to known hazards; minimizing exposures to recognized hazards; and providing instruction and protective equipment.

On a worksite where heat stress is a possibility, employers must:

- monitor the situation by using measuring instruments as defined in *General Regulation 91-191*, subsections 22(a)(b);
- train workers to recognize the symptoms of heat stress and what to do if it occurs as defined in *General Regulation 91-191*, subsection 23(1);

- make sure an adequate supply of fresh drinking water is available and that workers have frequent access to it.

While employers have responsibilities, so do employees. Under subsections 12(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, those responsibilities include:

- ensuring his/her own health and safety;
- reporting to the employer the existence of any hazard;
- wearing or using protective equipment when needed;
- following instructions and/or guidelines established to minimize any known workplace risk or hazard.



Hot summer weather can cause dangerous conditions for people who work in places such as bakeries, foundries, restaurant kitchens, laundries and pulp mills. A combination of high outdoor temperatures with heat build-up inside can be fatal.

You owe it to yourself and your co-workers to recognize the signs of heat stress and to know the proper first aid measures. Everyone should learn to take a few simple precautions to prevent heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke from happening in the first place.

Drink plenty of fluids

When working in hot conditions, your body can lose up to one litre of fluid per hour. Don't rely on thirst to tell you when or how much to drink. Drink large quantities of fluids before you begin to work and about one cup every 20 minutes while you work. The best fluid to drink is water, or liquids with some sodium content. Don't drink any form of alcohol – it causes your body to lose fluids.

Increase your salt intake slightly

The salt in most prepared foods should be sufficient, but if you're working in extreme conditions, drink liquids with some sodium content, or try an electrolyte replacement drink.

Wear appropriate clothing

Wear light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing that doesn't leave too much skin exposed. Wear a hat in the sun.

Take it slowly

Start by working slowly and taking short, frequent breaks. Gradually increase the frequency, intensity, or duration of your tasks as your comfort level improves. Some workers reach full acclimatization within a week; others take longer, depending on their size, stamina, and the type of work they're doing.

Listen to your body

Learn to recognize the three main forms of heat stress and their symptoms:

- **heat cramps** – painful muscle spasms, excessive sweating;
- **heat exhaustion** – headache, dizziness, weakness and nausea; clammy, moist skin;
- **heat stroke** – hot, dry, flushed skin; severe headache; confusion, delirium, convulsions and loss of consciousness.