

Work **Safe!** Bulletin

WORKER DISCOMFORT AND INCREASED TEMPERATURES

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When outside temperatures begin to climb, workers in offices, factories and schools, as well as outdoor builders and agricultural workers may experience discomfort problems.

Concerns involving work in elevated temperatures can range from discomfort to a more serious problem known as heat stress. It is necessary to differentiate between discomfort issues and heat stress, since each requires a different response.

General discomfort results from elevated "ambient" or surrounding air temperatures. In the spring and fall, fluctuating temperatures can create such situations. Daytime temperatures can reach more than 30 degrees Celsius, while nighttime temperatures can drop to levels which require the heating system to be on. Many buildings cannot operate cooling and heating systems at the same time. Partial relief from the heat may be obtained by opening windows in buildings which are not air conditioned.

Under the Workplace Safety and Health Act or Regulations there is no legislated maximum allowable temperature above which work may cease in the workplace.

However, certain measures can be taken to reduce discomfort during peak temperatures.

These include:

- using fans
- wearing light, loose fitting clothing
- taking more frequent rest breaks drinking cold beverages
- allowing flexibility to permit less physically demanding activities during peak temperature periods.

In general discomfort the use of salt tablets is not recommended.

Employers should be working with their safety and health committees, worker representatives or workers, in preparing a Hot Weather Plan and determining work procedures appropriate for periods of elevated temperatures.

In carrying out their duties under the Workplace Safety and Health Act, employers must take appropriate action to reduce discomfort, and thus further prevent worker exposure to safety and health hazards.

It is possible in some workplaces that workers may experience temperatures high enough to cause heat stress. Heat stress can be described as excessive heat that results in adverse health effects which will require medical attention.

As noted earlier in this bulletin, if the heat goes beyond a discomfort issue a different response is required. The employer should carefully examine all work procedures that require heavy manual labour or produce exposure to excessive radiant heat.

Further information on heat stress is available upon request from the *Workplace Safety and Health Division*.