TRUCKING INDUSTRY SAFETY

Heat Stress

Heat stress (thermal stress) at the workplace - both indoors and outdoors - can lead to workplace injuries and time loss claims. It is important for individuals who spend a lot of time working in hot environments to know about and understand the importance of heat stress and sun safety.

Who may be affected in our industry?

Anyone can be impacted by working in the heat – think of how the heat impacts you when doing weekend yard work for an hour or two on a hot summer day. Now consider what a full day in those conditions would be like, over the course of several days during a heat wave.

Within our industry, there are specific groups who are more likely to be impacted by the heat than others. These include (but are certainly not limited to):

- Truck drivers, who can be in and out of the truck all day, supervising loading and unloading of freight, inspecting equipment, and other activities.
- Truck and trailer technicians, dock and warehouse workers working in areas that are fast-paced and hard to cool due to their design (warehouse doors opening and closing regularly, making an already difficult to cool building harder to keep cool)
- Movers, who are involved in strenuous, repetitive, and heavy lifting tasks during the day while working outdoors during high heat temperatures.

Heat Stress Illnesses

Anyone who works in hot environments, or anyone who works with people who work in hot environments, should be aware of the signs of heat stress:

Heat rash: skin irritation caused by sweating a lot.

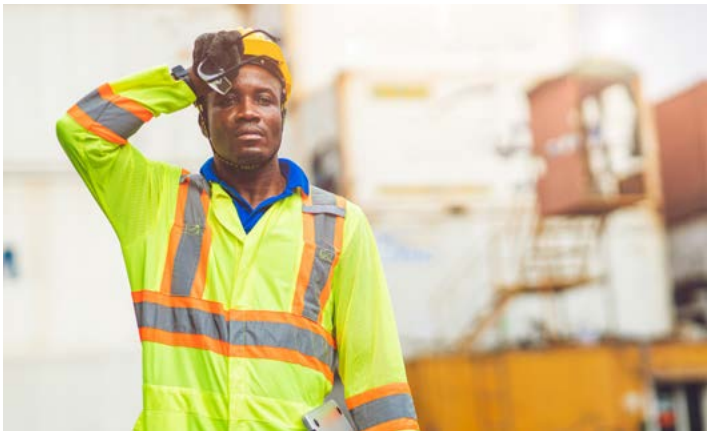
Heat cramps: excessive sweating results in low salt levels in the body, which can lead to muscle cramping.

Heat syncope: fainting or dizziness

Rhabdomyolysis: a serious medial condition caused by prolonged physical work in heat, rhabdomyolysis can result in seizures, irregular heart rhythms, and kidney damage.

Heat exhaustion: results from excessive loss of salt and dehydration.

Heat stroke: the body can no longer control its own temperature, which can result in death or permanent disability.



What can you do to prevent heat stress?

- Monitor the weather – high temperatures can be made worse by high levels of humidity.

- Keep hydrated (constant fluid replacement).
  - Drink plenty of cool water (average one litre every hour) in hot weather conditions.
  - Drink every 15 to 20 minutes, whether you feel thirsty or not, to replace fluid loss.
  - Avoid consuming caffeine and alcohol, which can contribute to dehydration.

- Become acclimatized:
  - Avoid strenuous activities too soon if you are not accustomed to the heat. It can take 7 to 14 days for the body to fully adapt (or acclimatize) to a hot environment.
  - Ease into your tasks gradually, taking frequent breaks from the heat as needed.
  - Consider assigning a reduced workload to new employees or those back from vacations or illnesses on the first day of work and gradually increase day by day.

- Wear protective clothing and equipment (sunglasses, hat or visor, long sleeves and pants, etc.)
  - Cover up as much as possible with loose-fitting clothes made of breathable light fabric to reduce sun exposure.

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- Plan for the heat when scheduling work activities:
  - Try to avoid long periods of time outside during the hottest times of day (which are also when the sun's UV rays are strongest)
  - Schedule hot jobs for the cooler part of the day (early morning, late afternoon, or night shift).
  - Move some tasks indoors or into the shade/erect a temporary shelter.
  - Take frequent breaks in a cool or well-ventilated area, out of the sun and heat.
  - Incorporate work-rest cycles and take breaks more often (micro-breaks).

- Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a minimum SPF 30
  - Sun exposure can cause sun burn, which is different from the illness that is caused by exposure to heat.

- Do not be afraid to sweat! Sweating is the body's most effective cooling mechanism. The cooling occurs as sweat evaporates. In some cases, a fan can be used to move cool air into a room and help keep body temperatures down.

What to do in case of emergency

If someone is suffering the effects of heat-related illness, immediate first aid is required as soon as the early symptoms of *heat stress* arise. Initial first aid should include:

- Removing employee from the hot environment.
- Keeping employee in shady and cool areas.
- Giving them cool water or other drinks (such as sports drinks, no alcoholic or caffeinated beverages) and snacks to prevent dehydration and salt loss as in heat cramps and hyponatremia.
- Areas with heat rash should be kept clean and dry at all times and no creams should be applied.

When *heat exhaustion* symptoms start to occur, along with previous first aid tips:

- Use ice packs and remove unnecessary clothing to cool down the body.
- If the heat exhaustion gets worse, then immediately go to the emergency room. No more work should be performed by the employee.

In case of a *heat stroke*:

- Immediately call 911 or take them to the nearest urgent care centre.
- Give them water to drink.
- Help employee in removing unnecessary clothing.
- Cool the worker with cold water or an ice bath (if possible: place cold cloths on the worker or soak their clothing with cold water and fan them).
- Place ice packs or cold cloths on the head, neck, armpits, and groin.
- Keep the employee in a cool, shady area.
- Give employee cool drinks.

Reporting and Training

- Report any incident associated with exposure to thermal stresses and the treatment provided. Include the date and time, conditions of work, health symptoms, protective measures, and treatment.
- Employers need to train employees to learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms associated with overexposure to thermal stresses, heat-related illnesses, and how to respond to them.
- Have an emergency action plan that includes procedures for providing affected workers with first aid and medical care. Workplaces where heat stress can occur should monitor conditions and ensure that workers get specified rest periods dependent on the measured heat levels.

Do you need more information? RPM can help!

RPM advisors are available to provide support, information, and education on a variety of topics to RPM registered companies.

Please note RPM courses are offered to RPM registered companies only. Your company must be registered with RPM and be in the process of working towards certification or must have achieved the SAFE Work Manitoba Trucking Certificate of Recognition. Not yet registered in the RPM program? Today is a great day to get started!

Please contact RPM by emailing info@rpmsafety.ca or calling 204-632-6600, or by visiting our website www.rpmsafety.ca.