

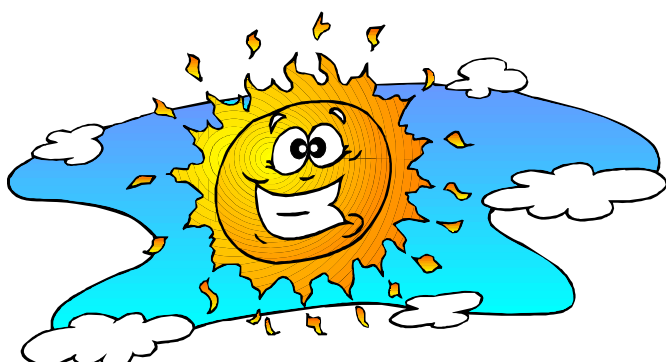


TechneTrain, Inc

OSHA Compliance Monthly

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Working in Hot Weather



Working in hot weather is a fact of life for many nursery and landscape employees. Strenuous physical activities in high temperatures and humidity have a high potential for inducing heat stress and subsequent illness among exposed workers. It is the responsibility of the employer to understand all risks associated with the work environment and to ensure that employees understand these risks and comply with safe work practices.

Many factors can affect an individual's sensitivity and response to heat: age, clothing, use of alcohol/drugs, metabolism rate, degree of physical conditioning, prescribed medications, and a variety of medical conditions.

Life threatening illnesses can occur when working in hot weather.

- **Heat Stroke** is a medical emergency that results from body temperature rising to a critical level, and it can progress to death. Symptoms include any or all of the following: dry pale skin, hot red skin that looks sunburned, mood changes, confusion, seizures, and unconsciousness.
- **Heat Exhaustion** can escalate to heat stroke and possible death if not treated. Primary symptoms include any or all of the following: pale clammy skin, headaches, dizziness or lightheadedness, weakness, mood changes, confusion, upset stomach, vomiting, fainting.

When either condition occurs, immediate action is required. In the case of heat stroke, call 911 for emergency help. For both conditions, move the victim to a shaded area/cool environment. Do not leave the person alone. If a victim is suffering from seizures, ensure that there are no objects in the immediate vicinity which could cause harm to the victim. If symptoms include dizziness or lightheadedness, lay the victim on his/her back and raise the legs 6 to 8 inches. If symptoms include nausea or vomiting, lay the victim on his/her side, loosen/remove any heavy clothing, and cool the person's body. This can be accomplished by fanning and spraying with a cool mist of water or by applying a wet cloth to the person's skin. Ice packs may be placed under the armpits and groin area. Have the person drink cool water (about a cup every 15 minutes) as tolerated by the individual's system. Call 911 for emergency help if an individual experiencing heat exhaustion does not feel better within a few minutes.

There are several other heat-induced illnesses that can occur when working in a hot environment.

- **Heat Fatigue** – Lack of acclimatization to work in a hot environment can lead to heat fatigue. Symptoms of heat fatigue included impaired physical and mental performance. A worker suffering from this condition should be removed from the heated environment before a more serious heat-related condition develops.
- **Heat Cramps** – Heavy sweating induced by physical labor in a hot environment can result in an electrolyte imbalance in an individual's body. This imbalance can frequently result in cramping, which can typically be resolved by drinking a commercially available carbohydrate-electrolyte replacement beverage.
- **Heat Collapse** – When heat causes one's blood to pool in the extremities, he / she may lose consciousness as a result of insufficient oxygen to the brain. This rapid and unpredictable situation can be avoided by, once again, making sure that workers are gradually acclimatized to physical labor in the hot environment.
- **Heat Rash** – The occurrence of a heat rash is the most common problem in hot work environments. These will typically disappear when an affected individual returns to a cool environment.



Prevention is the best defense against heat related illnesses. Simple measures that should be taken by all employees before and during work in hot weather include:

- Drink plenty of water – ensure that a fresh water supply is available.
- Wear light, loose-fitting, breathable clothing.
- Take frequent short breaks in cool shade.
- Eat smaller meals before work activity.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and large amounts of sugar.
- Ask your healthcare provider whether there are any heat-induced side effects related to medications that you are taking .

As the employer, it is your responsibility to ensure that employees understand and comply with all safe work practices. Along with ensuring that employees take the protective measures above, you should:

- Learn the signs and symptoms of heat-induced illness and how to respond.
- Train your workforce about heat-induced illness: how to recognize the symptoms, how to respond.
- Schedule the most physically demanding work during the coolest part of the day.
- Enable your employees to build up tolerance to heat and work activity slowly. This usually takes about 2 weeks.
- Have employees work in pairs.

This Publication has been provided Courtesy of TechneTrain, Inc., an OSHA Training & Support Firm. Because each business situation is different, this information is intended for general information purposes only and is not intended to provide legal advice.

Please do not hesitate to call with any questions.

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