SAFE WORK TIPS FOR WORKERS IN HOT ENVIRONMENTS
How Can I Protect Myself from the Effects of the Sun?

Some jobs must unavoidably take place in hot working environments. Working in conditions of extreme heat combined with additional stresses to the body from physical activity, loss of fluids, fatigue, and various other factors, can lead to dangerous health effects or can jeopardize worker safety. However, if the risks are understood and precautions are taken, work in hot environments can be performed in relative comfort and security.

Adapting to the Heat - Give workers time to get used to the heat. With gradual increased exposure, workers become better able to tolerate heat. Under normal circumstances, adjustment to heat usually takes about 5 to 7 days. Provide cool, shaded rest areas where workers can take periodic bas needed. Longer more frequent breaks may be necessary when it is very hot or the work is especially strenuous. Job sharing or heavy work rotation among several employees can also lessen the heat load on workers.

Re-hydration - Sweating is part of the body's natural cooling system, but it does result in water loss. The way to replace this loss and help the body continue to cool itself is to drink water throughout the day, at least one cup every 20-30 minutes. Thirst is not enough to insure sufficient water intake. Workers should be encouraged to drink before, during and after work. Alcohol, coffee, tea, and caffeinated soft drinks which cause dehydration should be avoided.

Appropriate Dress - Thin, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing aids in evaporation and allows air movement near the skin. Reflective clothing can shield the body from radiant and convective heat. Those who work outdoors should wear a hat and sunscreen for increased protection against the sun.

Physical Conditioning - Workers who are in good physical condition are better able to tolerate higher work temperatures. Encourage workers to stay in shape, avoid alcohol, and eat light, healthy meals. Heavy meals contribute to body heat and divert blood to the digestive system.

Engineering Controls - Fans, ventilators, exhaust systems, and air coolant systems help keep worksite temperatures to adaptable levels. Other controls such as installing heat shields and insulating heat-producing machinery can also help reduce radiant heat or areas or shade heavy equipment operators to lessen the sun’s intensity. Use available mechanical devices to reduce physical exertion.

Work Scheduling - To take advantage of climatic and other environmental conditions, start jobs earlier in the morning, and then space hot work throughout the day. Schedule more strenuous or hottest work for the coolest times of the day. Schedule more workers to reduce the workload, have them work in shifts or limit work hours within shifts to minimize exposure to high temperature and sun. Rotate work in areas where humidity may be high and air movement is minimal. Postpone nonessential tasks during heat spells.

Monitoring - Supervisors should check environmental conditions at least hourly and monitor worker response to the heated conditions. Heat stress is a silent hazard. Workers may not realize that there is a problem until heat stress is well advanced. The victim of serious heat distress must be transported as soon as possible to the nearest medical facility. In the meantime, every effort to reduce the victim’s body heat load must be made.

Educating - Workers should be aware of the need to replace fluids, recognize dehydration and heat exhaustion, and know what to do when these conditions appear. Workers should know how to get immediate emergency medical attention if a worker has one or more of the following symptoms: mental confusion or loss of consciousness, flushed face, hot dry skin or no sweating. Make sure all workers know who is trained to give first aid. The emergency phone numbers for ambulances, hospitals, and doctors should be posted and readily accessible at all job sites.