Cal/OSHA Reminds Employers to Protect Outdoor Workers from Heat Illness, Warns of Forthcoming Indoor Regulation

June 2018 — As the warmer summer weather approaches, it is crucial for employers to take seasonal precautions to protect employees from the serious risk of heat stroke. While protecting employees at outdoor worksites remains key, a proposed regulation for indoor work environments is forthcoming in 2019.

While it is still in the developmental stage, Cal/OSHA has been directed by law to draft and propose heat illness and injury prevention standards for indoor workplaces by January 1, 2019 (this is not an implementation date, but rather a proposal submission date). There are currently two options under consideration: Option A – amend Section 3395 to include indoor places of employment, or Option B – create a standalone indoor standard.

The proposed standards will be based on environmental temperatures, work activity levels and other factors. In particular, this new regulation will be significant for warehousing, manufacturing, restaurant businesses (among others) and it will be imperative these employers adopt this new regulation. The revised draft version dated May 16, 2018 can be viewed here.

START PREPARING YOUR WORKPLACE NOW

Until regulation is officially implemented, consider preparing now by reviewing the elements of the draft version and utilizing the “Excessive Heat at Work: How to Prevent Indoor Heat Illness” materials to assess your environment.


KNOW THE SIGNS AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

The following seasonal precautions are mandatory to avoid the more serious risk of heat stroke and a potential fatality if treatment is delayed. To keep your employees safe and to reduce your risk in the coming months, keep in mind the signs of heat illness, how to prevent them, and what your responsibilities are as an employer.

What is heat illness?

Heat illness can be one or more serious medical conditions like heat cramps, fainting, heat exhaustion and heatstroke. In a one-year investigation of 25 cases of suspected heat-related illnesses, Cal/OSHA found more than half of the heat illness victims died, and almost one third of them required hospitalization. Know the symptoms to watch for: discomfort, excessive sweating, headache, poor concentration, muscle pain, cramping, dizziness, fatigue, irritability, loss of coordination, throwing-up, blurry vision, confusion, lack of sweating, fainting, seizures.
What causes heat illness?

Heat illness occurs when your body retains more heat than it loses and your temperature rises. You are at greater risk of heat illness when you:

- Are dehydrated. Dehydration is your worst enemy during hot weather.
- Are not used to working in the heat.
- Are in poor health.
- Have had heat illness in the past.

What can you do to prevent heat illness?

Train employees to recognize the signs of heat illness and the ways to avoid it. The two best defenses against heat illness are:

- Getting out of the sun or finding a cool resting place when you are starting to overheat and need to cool down.
- Drinking cool, fresh water throughout the day (four 8-oz cups per hour) during hot weather. Don’t wait until you are thirsty to drink. Choose water over sodas or other drinks containing caffeine, alcohol or sugar.

Your responsibilities as an employer

Employees working outdoors, by law, must be guaranteed the following:

- Access to fresh, cool drinking water throughout the day.
- Access to shade (all employees) or an equally cool spot (if you are not an agricultural working) for 5 minutes at a time to rest and cool down.
- Training on how to work safely in the heat, including how to call for emergency services if someone is overcome by the heat.

Employers are required to put their heat illness prevention procedures, including employee training in writing. Cal/OSHA encourages employers to incorporate this document into the Injury and Illness Prevention Plan. The most frequent heat-related violation Cal/OSHA cites during enforcement inspections is for failure to have an effective, written heat illness prevention plan specific to the worksite, so be sure to remain compliant by doing so. Visit the Cal/OSHA website for more resource materials.

IF YOU HAVE FURTHER QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:

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