

HEAT STRESS –WORK SMART WHEN TEMPERATURES SOAR

Temperatures that are 10 degrees or more above the average high temperature and last for several days are defined as a heat wave. Employees who work in service, parts or body shop departments that are either poorly ventilated or not air conditioned, can experience temperatures over 100 degrees with humidity readings over 70%. Without proper precautions heat waves can cause heat stress which may prove fatal in some cases.

Common sense can go a long way in the prevention of heat stress. First, we need to understand what heat stress is and communicate it to employees, and second, we need to use safe work practices that can help prevent heat stress. Below you will find some work practices and precautions that will help:

DRINK PLENTY OF FLUIDS - Your body needs water, salt and minerals to function. Drink plenty of cool water, natural juices or sports drinks containing electrolytes even if you're not thirsty. Avoid alcohol, pop, coffee or other caffeinated beverages. These are diuretics that remove fluids from the body. A glass of water each hour is recommended, 2-4 glasses of water per hour if working hard in a hot environment.

EAT LIGHT - Heavy meals add heat to the body and send blood away from the skin to the digestive system. They increase metabolic heat production and also increase water loss. Eat small, light meals.

WATCH YOUR MEDICATIONS - Alcohol, caffeine and medicines for blood pressure and allergies increase the risk of heat stress. Let your supervisor know if you are taking any meds or have any conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes that can put you at risk.

WORK WITH CARE - Set up fans to keep the air moving, use a cool rag on the back of your neck, and wear light clothes that are loose. Shorts can be worn in the shop as long as the employee is not performing any welding, cutting or handling caustic materials. (Most importantly, DO NOT ignore the signs of heat stress)

HANDLING HEAT RELATED ILLNESSES

HEAT CRAMPS - Heavy exertion causes fluids to be lost by sweating which results in cramps. **SYMPTOMS** - Painful spasms usually in leg and abdominal muscles. **FIRST AID** - Remove individual to a cool area. Place firm pressure on cramping muscles or stretch affected muscles to relieve spasm. Give sips of water, juice or sports beverage. If nausea occurs, discontinue giving liquids. If cramps do not subside in one hour, or if you have heart problems or are on a low sodium diet seek medical attention.

HEAT EXHAUSTION - Body fluids and salt become lost through heavy sweating. Blood flow to the skin increases, redirecting blood from vital organs, which can result in mild shock. **SYMPTOMS** - Heavy sweating, weakness. Cold, pale or clammy skin. Fast and weak pulse. Muscle cramps. Normal temperature possible. Dizziness or fainting,

nausea or vomiting and headache. **FIRST AID** - Lie victim down in a cool place, loosen clothing, give sips of cool water, juice or sports drink. Apply cool wet cloths. If nausea persists, discontinue giving liquids. If vomiting occurs or symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour, seek medical attention.

Heat stress can seriously interfere with the employee's ability to work safely. Serious injuries can occur when an employee who is suffering heat stress symptoms makes mistakes. Management and employees cannot ignore any symptoms of heat stress. Heat stress if untreated can become heat exhaustion which if ignored can lead to heat stroke which can be fatal. Management and employees must be diligent in identifying situations that may lead to heat stress and in following the above precautions to avoid heat related illnesses and injuries.