

NEWS RELEASE: **Health risks rise with temperatures for outdoorworkers**

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For immediate release:

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Health risks rise with temperatures for outdoor workers Know the signs of heat exhaustion; be proactive in preventing it.

When the mercury hits 90 degrees or more, working outdoors can be uncomfortable and, at times, unsafe. Workers run the risk of developing a heat-related illness when physical exertion is combined with high humidity.

Over the past five years, 32 workers received benefits through Oregon's workers' compensation system for heat-related illnesses. The workers who qualified for the benefit were disabled for three days or more. Oregon OSHA, a division of the Department of Consumer and Business Services, does not require companies to report less-severe cases of heat exhaustion.

Employers and workers should be familiar with some of the common indicators of heat exhaustion. A person overcome with heat exhaustion will still sweat but may experience extreme fatigue, nausea, lightheadedness, or a headache. The person could have clammy and moist skin, a pale complexion, and a normal or only slightly elevated body temperature. If heat exhaustion is not treated promptly, the illness could progress to heat stroke, and possibly even death.

Workers on construction sites may be at greater risk for heat illness due to heavy exertion, enclosed operator cabs with poor air circulation, and prolonged exposure to the sun.

To help a person suffering from heat exhaustion:

- Move them to a cool, shaded area. Don't leave them alone. If they are dizzy or light-headed, lay them on their back and raise their legs about 6-8 inches at the feet. If they are sick to their stomach, lay them on their side.
- Loosen and remove heavy clothing.
- Provide cool water to drink (a small cup every 15 minutes) if they are not feeling sick to their stomach.
- Try to cool them by fanning them. Cool the skin with a spray mist of cold water or a wet cloth.
- If they do not feel better in a few minutes, call 911 for emergency help.

Certain medications can increase a worker's risk. It's important to have workers check with their health care provider or pharmacy to see if their medicine affects them differently when working in a hot

environment. People who have experienced a heat-induced illness in the past or who must wear personal protective equipment while on the job are at higher risk for heat illness.

Heat stroke is a different condition than heat exhaustion. There are several reactions that occur in the human body with heat stroke: dry, pale skin (no sweating); hot, red skin (looks like a sunburn); mood changes; irritability and confusion; and collapsing (person will not respond to verbal commands).

Follow the same steps for responding to heat stroke as with heat exhaustion but take note of these critical differences:

- Call for emergency help immediately (ambulance or 911).
- Keep the person in a cool area; if a seizure is under way, remove objects close to the worker that could be harmful.
- Try to find ice for cooling packs while medical services respond. Place ice packs in the armpits and groin area.

The ideal situation to prevent heat illness is to protect workers. Here are some tips:

- Learn the signs and symptoms of heat-induced illnesses and what to do to help other workers.
- Perform the heaviest, most labor-intensive work during the coolest part of the day.
- Slowly build up tolerance to the heat and the work activity (this usually takes up to two weeks).
- Use the buddy system to monitor the heat (work in pairs).
- Drink plenty of cool water (one small cup every 15-20 minutes).
- Wear light, loose-fitting, breathable clothing (such as cotton).
- Take frequent short breaks in cool, shaded areas - allow your body to cool down.
- Avoid eating large meals before working in hot environments.
- Avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages (these beverages make the body lose water and increase the risk of heat illnesses).

A "Heat Stress Safety" pocket reminder card is available from Oregon OSHA. You can download the card, in both English and Spanish, from Oregon OSHA's Web site, www.orosha.org, under "Publications"; look for "Heat Stress Card" (#3333E). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) also has a booklet with heat-stress prevention tips