



Summertime Safety Planning

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “unusually hot summer temperatures have become more common across the contiguous 48 states in recent decades,” resulting in higher numbers of heat-related deaths and illnesses; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that more than 600 people die in the United States by extreme heat every year.

And in that extreme heat are thousands of people performing various important jobs and tasks, making sure that life can continue comfortably and safely. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that from 2011 to 2019, 255 U.S. workers died from extreme environmental heat exposure, with 57 deaths occurring to older workers (55 to 64), 144 to those working construction, repair or cleaning, as well as 54 people who were conducting materials handling operations.

With hot summers becoming increasingly frequent and even normal, employers need to pay more attention to safety when working in heat, if it’s not a priority already. But in addition to the very serious hazard of hot working conditions, as you’ll read below, summer also brings a number of other occupational hazards that must be identified and mitigated for the safety of your team members and your organization.

Heat Stress

The most dangerous occupational hazard during summer, heat stress, encompasses several heat-related illnesses including heat stroke, heat cramps, heat rashes, heat exhaustion and according to the OSHA, even rhabdomyolysis (rhabdo), which is the breakdown of muscle tissue due to performing prolonged physical work in excessive heat. OSHA says that workers who are at increased risk of heat stress include people over the age of 65, those who are overweight and have heart disease or high blood pressure, as well as people taking certain medications that may make them more sensitive to extreme heat.

Because heat stress is a somewhat broad category of illnesses, the mitigation strategies required need to be comprehensive and strategic in order to successfully protect your team. During the months when heat stress is a concern, a manual or an automated check-in system should be implemented in which the employee checks in with their employer to confirm their safety at predetermined intervals or times; in high-risk circumstances or environments, employ shorter check-in intervals to verify the worker’s well-being; adaptation to heat may require some time and varies from person to person.

Additionally, a fall detection device is also a major asset because it will detect dangerous impacts on the employee and request help immediately. Some fall detection technologies include separate devices, and some can be used on existing devices like your smartphone. If a worker collapses, this tool will let you know right away.

Hot Surfaces

Equipment, tools and work surfaces can become incredibly hot during the summer, reaching temperatures that can actually cause first- and second-degree burns when touched. Particularly with surfaces and equipment that are exposed to direct sunlight, employees need to be educated and possibly trained on the hazards of hot surfaces, depending on where they work.

To address this hazard, employers must perform a hazard assessment of the work environment, documenting all occupational hazards as well as identification of areas with potentially hot surfaces.

Once identified, look at strategies to mitigate the hazard such as “Do not touch” and “Hot surface” signs, as well other measures such as PPE like protective gloves, relocation of equipment into shaded areas and resurfacing/painting work surfaces with heat-reflective coatings and paint.

Wildlife and Insects

Some workers are in natural work environments during the summer and are therefore exposed to the wildlife and insects who call it their home. This puts workers at risk of animal attacks and the infections and diseases that can result. There could also be insects that can cause painful bites or possibly worse.

If your team members work around wildlife, training in how to deal with that wildlife must be performed amongst staff as well as any needed PPE such as face shields or protective eyewear. Devices like a panic button can also be very effective, empowering the employer to request emergency help at the simple press of a button.

Eye Damage

Did you know that PPE is everywhere, and most people don’t know it? Sunglasses are a mainstream form of PPE that needs to be taken seriously when working outside in the sunshine. Doctors say that “long-term exposure to even small amounts of UV radiation can increase your risk of developing a cataract or macular degeneration. UV exposure adds up over time.” This especially includes those working long hours in the sun and who may need to read smaller print in persistent, bright sunlight.

Polarized protective sunglasses and eyewear can protect these people comfortably over long periods of time. But additionally, employers should provide these employees with protective headwear and hats, as well accessible areas for regular shade and water breaks.

Confined Spaces

Working in confined spaces can be hot and uncomfortable in the colder months, but during summer, they can be stifling and very dangerous. According to OSHA, “confined spaces include, but are not limited to, tanks, vessels, silos, storage bins, hoppers, vaults, pits, manholes, tunnels, equipment housings, ductwork, pipelines, etc.” These spaces can not only get very hot but can also have low oxygen levels and noxious gases, making them even more of a hazard.

When working in confined, hot spaces, many of these people are actually classified as lone workers; they are performing their jobs in isolation and getting them help in an emergency can be a significant challenge, depending on the space or structure they are working in. In these cases, communication is key. Provide them with reliable means of communication that they can use to request help quickly and easily in a tight physical space.

Slip, Trips and Falls

A major misconception about slips, trips and falls is that they are more of a threat during the winter. Yes, ice and snow can make walkways more treacherous, but the warmer months also present their own fall hazards. In the summer, slips, trips and falls occur around small bodies of standing water like pools, ponds and hoses that cross walkways and work areas.

Like working in the winter, regular clearing of work walkways is absolutely essential in order to prevent dangerous slips and falls. However, around bodies of water, coatings can be applied to

walking surfaces that prevent slipping. On top of that, if workers are at a significant risk, provide instruction and education to staff such as safety training and signage identifying slippery areas where caution is required. Installation of handrails and guardrails may be needed.

Drowning

In addition to slips and falls, increased work around bodies of water presents the occupational threat of drowning while at work. As we said, employees can slip, causing injuries, but also fall into pools of water, putting their lives in serious danger. According to Stop Drowning Now, there is an average of 10 drowning deaths a day in the United States, some occurring while at work.

Proactivity and Planning

Regardless of the summer safety hazards your team may face in the coming months, it's important to be proactive and plan as much as possible. By assessing any potential hazard now, you can prepare certain areas of your safety program for the specific safety challenges that summer presents. Look back at incidents, health and safety reports from past seasons to identify any trends or information that can help you plan more effectively.

Explore the innovative, very effective technologies available to protect your team members such as the [OSHA's Heat Safety Tool](#), an app that calculates the heat index for your worksite and based on that index, will provide you with the working risk level for your outdoor workers.

The most important point, however, is that throughout your safety planning, there is regular consultation with all levels of your staff impacted by the resulting safety protocols and measures. Work safety is an organizational priority as much as it is an individual one, so having everyone in agreement and in sync with occupational health and safety is goal that every organization should strive for this summer.