

WEEKLY SAFETY TIP – 5/9/11 – THE HEAT IS ON!

A few years ago, a worker in a chemical plant fainted from heat exhaustion. He had been doing repair work in a confined space, while wearing a chemical protective suit. The good news was that he exited the space before he fainted, and a medical response team was close at hand to provide immediate first aid. He was not seriously injured or ill. This was unusual because it occurred in February on a cold, cloudy day.

We most often think of heat illness as being associated with working in the sun on a hot day. This is the case with thousands of workers each year, who report varying degrees of heat illnesses. The most serious form of heat illness – heat stroke can potentially be fatal. However, most of the time, heat illness is preventable.

There are some steps you can take to lessen the likelihood that you would be affected by heat illnesses.

1 – Get acclimated as time and conditions allow. Gradually spend more and more time in the heat, if you can.

2 – Plan the job. If you can, try to perform the work earlier or later in the day, when the temperature is not as hot. To help you prepare for extreme heat conditions, here is a link to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) site: Heat Watch:
<http://www.noaawatch.gov/themes/heat.php>

3 – Prepare for hydration. For Employers: When working in hot environments there should be two gallons of water available per employee for an eight-hour workday. And for Workers: Come to work hydrated. Remember that caffeinated drinks and/or alcohol can dehydrate you. Think water – and lots of it.

4 – Dress for heat success: While what you wear may be determined by what you are doing, such as the worker at the chemical plant going into a confined space, when possible wear loose fitting clothing that is “breathable”. This will allow for more air and better body cooling. And when possible, wear a hat.

5 – Take a break in the shade. If no trees or buildings are available to provide shade, make a break area with some cooling cover.

6 – Check your meds. Some medications decrease your body’s ability to adjust to the heat, or make natural cooling more difficult. If you are unsure, consult your physician about your medications. Employers should monitor workers who might be more susceptible to illnesses from heat exposure.

These are just a few steps you can take to prevent heat illnesses. To help you learn more we recommend you visit a new page implemented by OSHA, dedicated to preventing heat illnesses. You can view it in English and Spanish here: OSHA Heat Illness:

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/index.html>