

Managing Heat Risks on Site

High temperatures and direct sunlight increase the risk of sunburn, dehydration, heat stress, eye damage and reduced concentration. These hazards can affect safety, productivity and decision-making, so it's important to set clear expectations and controls to help workers manage heat exposure safely.

5 Practical Ways to Keep Workers Safe When Working in the Heat

Communicate Expectations Around Suitable PPE

You should make sure your workers understand what PPE and sun protection is appropriate for hot conditions. All items should meet Australian Standards.

Workers should be informed that suitable protection includes:

- Broad-brimmed hats or brim attachments for hard hats
- Loose long-sleeved shirts
- Long, lightweight pants
- Wrap-around sunglasses
- Broad-spectrum sunscreen

You should also check that workers are following these requirements to help minimise UV and heat exposure.

Provide Access to Shade and Clearly Structured Breaks

Plan work in a way that reduces unnecessary time in direct sunlight. This includes ensuring workers have access to shaded, cool and well-ventilated rest areas, and that break times are clearly communicated so workers know when and where they can step out of the heat.

If natural shade is limited, portable shade structures can be provided. Adjusting schedules or rotating tasks so high-exposure work is done during cooler parts of the day can further reduce risk.

Support Hydration Awareness and Monitor Worker Wellbeing

Workers should be reminded that staying hydrated throughout the day is essential and that can be supported with easy access to water and if possible, electrolytes. They should also understand that dehydrating drinks, such as soft drinks, energy drinks or excessive caffeine, should be avoided in hot conditions.

You should keep an eye out for signs of fatigue, dehydration or any behaviour changes so concerns can be addressed early.

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Key considerations:

- Make water easily accessible
- Ensure workers understand hydration expectations
- Watch for signs of heat-related symptoms

Ensure Workers Recognise Heat Stress and Responsibility Quickly

Workers should be made aware of early symptoms of heat stress, including dizziness, nausea, rapid heartbeat and unusual fatigue. They should not return to high-risk tasks, such as operating machinery, driving or working at heights, until they have fully recovered.

It is also essential to ensure workers are aware of who the trained first aiders are and the location of first aid kits and emergency equipment.

Promote Skin Protection and a Culture of Awareness

You should encourage your workers to protect their skin by applying sunscreen before work and reapplying throughout the day. Routine skin checks are recommended for workers who spend long periods outdoors.

Creating a culture where workers look out for one another can help identify symptoms of heat stress or unusual behaviour early.

Quick Quiz

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| 1 | What early signs of heat stress should workers be aware of? |
| 2 | Which drinks contribute to dehydration and should be avoided on hot days? |
| | In hot conditions, which is the safest option for hydration: water, an electrolyte drink or chocolate milk? |

Talk to your site supervisor and your IRP consultant about any safety concerns you have before it's too late! IRP – 9477 7999