Heat stress toolbox talk

Health · about 5 minutes · read it out, or say it in your own words

SITE OR JOB	DATE	PRESENTER

On a South African summer site the crew works in full sun on roofs, slabs and open ground, often doing hard physical work. Heat exhaustion can turn into heatstroke, which is a medical emergency, and a person who is overheating also makes mistakes, slips and drops things. The Physical Agents Regulations now place clear duties on employers to control heat stress.

SAY THIS

Why heat is a real hazard

When you work hard in the sun, your body has to get rid of heat by sweating. If you lose more water than you drink, or the heat builds up faster than you can lose it, your body starts to struggle. First you feel tired and slow. If nobody notices, it can become heatstroke, and heatstroke can kill. Hot days also cause accidents, because a tired, dizzy person misses a step or loses grip.

Drink before you feel thirsty

There is clean drinking water at the site, and it is there for you. Drink small amounts often through the day, not one big bottle at lunch. Thirst is a late warning, so do not wait for it. Fizzy drinks and energy drinks are not a replacement for water. Alcohol the night before makes the next hot day much harder on your body.

Shade, rest and clothing

Take your breaks in the shade, not next to the mixer in the sun. Keep your shirt on: long sleeves in a light colour protect your skin from sunburn and keep you cooler than bare skin. Wear a brim or neck flap with your hard hat if you have one. Where we can, we will do the heaviest work, like casting and carrying, early in the day.

New people need time

Someone who is new on site, or who has been off sick or on leave, is not used to the heat yet. Their body needs a few days to adjust. Give them lighter work at first and keep an eye on them. Older workers, and anyone who is ill or taking medicine, can also be at higher risk.

Know the warning signs

Watch yourself and the person next to you. Heat exhaustion looks like heavy sweating, pale and clammy skin, headache, dizziness, feeling sick, cramps and being very thirsty. Heatstroke is worse: hot skin that may stop sweating, fast breathing, confusion, strange behaviour, collapse or a fit. A person with heatstroke often does not realise they are in trouble.

What to do

If someone shows signs of heat illness, stop their work straight away. Call the first aider and tell the supervisor. Move them into shade, loosen tight clothing, cool their skin with water and a fan or a piece of cardboard, and let them sip water if they are awake and can swallow. If they are confused, collapse or do not feel better within 30 minutes, phone for an ambulance at once. Never leave them alone and never send them home on their own.

CHECK ON SITE TODAY

- [ ] Where is the drinking water, is it cool and clean, and can everyone reach it without walking far?
- [ ] Is there shade for breaks on this site, and if not, can we put up shade cloth or use a building?
- [ ] Which jobs today are in full sun for long periods, and can we move the heaviest of them to the morning?
- [ ] Who is new, back from leave or not feeling well, and who is keeping an eye on them?
- [ ] Is the first aid box stocked and does everyone know who the first aider is and where the emergency numbers are?

ASK THE CREW

- ? Have you ever felt dizzy or sick on a hot day at work? What did you do?
- ? What makes it hard to drink enough water on this site, and how can we fix it?
- ? Which part of this job is the hottest, and what would make it easier?
- ? How would you know if the person working next to you was getting into trouble with the heat?

PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FOR THIS JOB

Hard hat with a brim or neck flap where available · Light-coloured long-sleeved shirt and long trousers · Sunscreen for exposed skin · Safety glasses with UV protection for bright conditions

THE LAW

Physical Agents Regulations, 2024, regulation 10: Heat stress; Physical Agents Regulations, 2024, regulation 4: Duties of persons who may be exposed to a physical agent; Facilities Regulations, 2004, regulation 7: Drinking water; Construction Regulations, 2014, regulation 30: Construction employees' facilities. What each one says, in plain words, with links: sitediary.co.za/toolbox-talks/heat-stress/

Toolbox talk attendance register

TOPIC

Heat stress and working in the sun

DATE

SITE OR JOB

TIME

PRESENTER

COMPANY

PRESENTER SIGNATURE

By signing, I confirm that I attended this toolbox talk, that it was given in a language I understand, and that I could ask questions.

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Keep this register in the site health and safety file. Log the talk in today's site diary with a photo of this page.