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## Working in Hot Weather

With temperatures soaring into the 90's (and hitting over 100 degrees with the heat index), much of the Indiana has felt the effects of these oppressive temperatures. Most Hoosiers are taking it easy, and staying cool. Those with pools are spending time in the water, and many lake and outdoor recreational facilities (with water facilities) are being filled to capacity. But what about those who have no choice but to **work** in this heat? Unfortunately, those employed in outside areas or within outdoor working conditions do not have much of a choice. By now, most people are aware to stay hydrated when it is warm outside, and also to apply sunscreen liberally when working or spending time outdoors. But as an employer, are you aware of weather conditions that can harm your employee and ones that are compensable under workers compensation?

### Working in the heat: Be aware

According the Indiana [Work comp handbook](#), *heat stroke*, *heat prostration and sunstroke* injuries may be compensable if the employment puts the worker at a greater risk for such injuries than the general public. Not sure what some of the symptoms of these heat-affected illnesses may be? See below for an OSHA recap and explanation of heat disorders and the health effects of these disorders.

### HEAT STROKE AND HEALTH EFFECTS

#### Heat Fatigue

Heat fatigue occurs when an individual is not able to acclimate to an environment. Symptoms of heat fatigue can include an impaired performance with motor skills. The only treatment for heat fatigue is to remove the heat stress before it develops into a more serious heat-related condition. The use of a program of acclimatization and training for work in hot environments is advisable.

#### HEAT RASHES

These types of rashes are one of the most common problems in hot work environments. Referred to as 'prickly heat' this rash is manifested as red papules and usually appears in areas where the clothing is restrictive. As sweating increases, these papules give rise to a prickling sensation. Prickly heat occurs in skin that is persistently wetted by unevaporated sweat, and heat rash papules may become infected if they are not treated. For the most part, prickly heat will disappear when those affected return to a normal/cool environment.

#### HEAT CRAMPS

Heat cramps are usually caused by performing hard physical labor in a hot environment. Many times, these cramps are attributed to an electrolyte imbalance caused by sweating. ***It is important to understand that cramps can be caused by both too much and too little salt.*** It appears that cramps are caused by the lack of water replenishment. What many need to realize is that thirst cannot be relied on as a guide to the need for water. Instead, water must be taken every 15 to 20

minutes in hot environments.

### **HEAT EXHAUSTION**

Signs and symptoms can include headache, weakness, thirst and nausea. Heat exhaustion responds very well to prompt treatment, though it should not be treated lightly. Symptoms and signs of heat exhaustion can be similar to heat stroke. Those who are affected by heat exhaustion should immediately be removed from the heated environment and given fluids. Rest is also recommended.

### **HEAT STROKE**

Heat Stroke occurs when the body's system of temperature regulation fails and body temperature rises to critical levels. Symptoms can include confusion; irrational behavior; loss of consciousness; convulsions; a lack of sweating (usually); hot, dry skin; and an abnormally high body temperature, e.g., a rectal temperature of 41°C (105.8°F). An extremely high body temperature **can** cause death. It is recommended that medical treatment be obtained immediately if signs of heat stroke are shown by the worker. It is also recommended to remove the worker from direct sun and remove the outer clothing if possible. The skin may be wetted and air movement around the worker can be increased to improve the worker's condition until professionals can assess the individual and start proper methods of cooling.

**This should be treated as a medical emergency.**

**Source:** *OSHA: Heat Stroke and Health Effects*

Though some of the above heat disorders can be minor, most can lead to the disorders that can cause severe health issues, or even lead to death. As personnel within your organization may be covering shifts for others on vacation, or maybe new employees are starting within new positions(outdoor positions), you may want to take an extra precaution during the warm weather to ensure all employees are trained for heat disorders, and how to handle heat issues within the workplace.

### **References**

[Work comp handbook](http://www.in.gov/wcb/files/HANDBK2007.doc)

<http://www.in.gov/wcb/files/HANDBK2007.doc>

[OSHA: Heat Stroke and Health Effects](http://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/otm_iii/otm_iii_4.html#2)

[http://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/otm\\_iii/otm\\_iii\\_4.html#2](http://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/otm_iii/otm_iii_4.html#2)

[Workers struggle to stay cool](http://www.wfwi.com/dpp/weather/workers-struggle-to-stay-cool)

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