



## SCHOOLCOMP PROGRAM MANAGER

Workers' Compensation Newsletter

May 2018

### SIGNS OF HEAT EXHAUSTION/HEAT STROKE

Heavy sweating, headache, and excessive thirst are among the most common symptoms of heat exhaustion.

Signs of heat exhaustion can also include fatigue, clammy skin, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, rapid heartbeat, increased temperature, muscle cramps and fainting.

If heat exhaustion progresses to heat stroke, the person's body temperature may exceed 104° F.

Signs of heat stroke include dry skin, lack of sweating, and disorientation.

Heat stroke is a serious condition requiring immediate medical attention.



### HEAT STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Heat stress includes a series of conditions in which the body is under stress from overheating. It can be induced by high temperatures, heavy workloads, and clothing that is inappropriate for the heat and humidity of the summer months.

#### At-Risk Employees

Some employees are more likely to have heat-related disorders than others. Employees with heart, lung, or kidney disease, diabetes, and those on medications are more likely to experience heat stress problems. Diet pills, sedatives, caffeinated drinks and alcohol consumption can all exacerbate the effects of heat stress.

It often takes two to three weeks for employees to become acclimated to a hot environment. However, they can become de-acclimated in only a few days away from the heat. Thus, employees should be cautious about heat stress when returning from a vacation, beginning a new work task or working during a heat wave. Precautions should be taken any time temperatures exceed 90 degrees when the work being performed is physically demanding.

#### Prevention

Ways to mitigate heat stress during summer work activities include adjusting the work schedule so that heavier work is performed on cooler days or during the cooler part of the day. Employees should also be encouraged to use equipment that helps reduce the amount of physical labor involved in performing a task on hot days. Rest periods and water breaks should be scheduled throughout the day, and supervisors should also avoid placing "high risk" employees in hot work environments for extended periods of time.

#### Treatment

If you suspect an employee has heat exhaustion, the best thing to do is bring him or her indoors and have them sit in an air-conditioned room. If you're outside, move the employee to a shady area. Replace lost fluids by having the employee drink cool (not icy cold) water or a sports drink with electrolytes. Apply a cold cloth to the employee's skin and call 911 if you suspect the employee has heat stroke.



## REPORTING IS THE KEY TO INJURY PREVENTION

An employee slips on a wet floor and tells you they're OK. A few days later, they're experiencing serious back pain and can barely walk. This is an example of why reporting all workplace injuries is important. What may seem minor at the time can worsen, become chronic or lead to complications such as infection, disease or disability. Therefore, it's important to report any injury, no matter how insignificant you initially believe it may be. Allow us to distinguish between what may be a "report only" incident and an actual compensable injury. Failing to promptly report workplace injuries can also increase the cost of your claims. When reporting workplace injuries, describe what happened as accurately as possible. In addition to the employee's account of injury, obtain statements from supervisory personnel and co-worker witnesses. Knowing the specifics of how a work injury occurred can go a long way to preventing the same situation from arising again in the future.

On a similar note, you should encourage your employees to report "near miss" injuries. Although these situations do not need to be filed as a claim, they can serve as notice to school administrators and supervisors that something is wrong and needs to be corrected. In truth, most accidents are preceded by near misses. These are incidents that almost happened or did happen but didn't result in an injury this time around. An example of a near miss incident would include a situation where someone tripped over an extension cord but did not fall. Another example would be when an employee used a ladder that was broken or in need of repair and nearly fell to the ground. By recognizing near misses and taking action to correct the underlying problem, you will be able to reduce the number of actual injuries that could occur in the future.

## SAFETY TIPS FOR END OF YEAR CLEAN UP

The end of the school year is a peak period for strain and sprain injuries due to the increase in clean up and furniture relocation tasks. Careful planning is needed to develop the safest and most efficient way to undertake these tasks.

**Trash Disposal** – Don't overfill waste paper bins. Small bins should be light enough to pick up. Placing heavy books or items in these bins increases the risk of injury for employees who have to empty the bins. Instead, workers should place heavier trash bins on chairs or counters. This saves a lot of repetitive bending during the cleaning process. Also, schools should initiate a progressive clean-up plan over the last few weeks of the school year instead of the last few days.

**Relocating Furniture/Equipment** – Make sure there are enough people available to assist with the process of moving furniture or equipment. Also ensure that essential moving tools are available (i.e. carts, dollies, etc.). Keep in mind that large scale moving activities should be planned like any other major project. School administrators should always be consulted before the moving process begins. Finally, it's important to consider the "big picture" costs of moving heavy furniture in a school. Utilizing professionals to move these items may be much more efficient and inexpensive when compared to the human and financial costs of an injury to a staff member.

