

Heat-related illnesses still a threat for Pennsylvania workers

Now that we are approaching the dog days of summer, it is important for workers and employers to be aware of the dangers of heat-related illnesses. It is especially important for employees in Pennsylvania who work outside this summer to be aware of the signs of heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses to stay safe on the job.

Heat stroke is a very serious illness and can be fatal. More than 30 workers die every year from heat stroke, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. While many employers in Pennsylvania may not think their workers are at risk for heat stroke because they live on the east coast, many workers in Pennsylvania and other cooler climates are at risk for heat-related workplace illnesses.

OSHA does not currently have a heat prevention standard, but heat-related illnesses do fall under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. The law requires employers to provide a work environment that is free from hazards that can cause serious injury or death to their workers. This includes protecting employees from heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses.

OSHA said that employers should use the heat index and consider the temperature and humidity before deciding if it is safe to allow employees to work outside. If the temperature and humidity is higher, employers should be sure workers drink plenty of fluids and are able to take rest breaks where they can rest in a cool area out of the sun, preferably in an air-conditioned area.

What steps should workers and employers take to prevent heat-

related illness. Several tips are listed below:

- Provide air-conditioned or shaded areas and allow workers to take frequent rest breaks.
- Provide water and other liquids for workers.
- Remind workers to drink water consistently throughout the work period to prevent dehydration.
- Reschedule jobs when heat exposure is high.
- Monitor workers for signs and symptoms of heat stroke and heat exposure and train employees to know these signs.
- Create an emergency plan for what to do if workers experience symptoms of heat-related illness.

Source: Corporate Counsel, "What Employers Need to Know About Heat-Related Illness," Shannon Green, June 4, 2013