Heat is a preventable threat to outdoor workers

Temperatures are rising in Pennsylvania. The average high temperature in Philadelphia in June is typically in the 80s and will only go up in July and August. For outdoor workers, hot weather is a real threat. Heat related illnesses are also preventable.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration says there were 4,120 heat-related worker illnesses and 31 deaths nationally in 2012. Workers most at risk include construction workers site accidents, landscaping employees, transportation workers and agricultural employees. That’s because physically challenging activities in hot weather can result in body temperatures that are higher than can be cooled by sweating.

According to The Johns Hopkins Hospital, there are three different types of heat-related illnesses. They are:

- Heat cramps: The mildest kind of heat injury. Symptoms usually involve muscle cramps and spasms .
- Heat exhaustion: This results from a loss of water and sweat in the body Symptoms include pale, most skin, fever over 100.4 degrees, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, headache, fatigue and other symptoms. If not properly treated, it can turn into heat stroke.
- Heat stroke: This is the most severe heat related illness. Symptoms include warm, dry skin, a high fever, rapid heart rate, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, headache, confusion, lethargy, seizures and coma.

Heat-related illnesses disproportionately affect workers who have not built up a tolerance to heat, particularly new or temporary workers.

Employers are responsible for provide a safe workplace for

employees, and that includes heat-related illnesses. Frequent water breaks, shade and time to rest can prevent serious injuries or illnesses.

Source: The Times and Democrat, “HEAT ILLNESSES: Labor Department launches campaign to protect outdoor workers in summer,” June 1, 2014; Johns Hopkins Medicine, “Heat-Related Illnesses (Heat Cramps, Heat Exhaustion, Heat Stroke).”