

# SUMMERTIME EMPLOYEE SAFETY: HEAT EXHAUSTION AND HEAT STROKE

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Summer 2001 Headline: *NFL Football Player Dies of Heat Stroke*

Last year, the nation's awareness of heat stroke was front-page news. If the death of a highly paid professional surrounded by doctors and trainers can occur, what can happen at your operation? With the summer season approaching what can you do to keep your operation's name out of the paper? This article will assist you and your employees to recognize the hazards of heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Definitions:

## **heat exhaustion**

Miller-Keane Medical Dictionary, 2000 "*A disorder resulting from overexposure to heat or to the sun; called also heat prostration. Long exposure to extreme heat or too much activity under a hot sun causes excessive sweating, which removes large quantities of salt and fluid from the body. When the amount of salt and fluid in the body falls too far below normal, heat exhaustion may result*"

## **Sunstroke**

Miller-Keane Medical Dictionary, 2000 "*(sun'strök) a profound disturbance of the body's heat-regulating mechanism caused by prolonged exposure to excessive heat from the sun, particularly when there is little or no circulation of air. Sunstroke is a type of heat stroke; the category heat stroke also covers disorders caused by other forms of intense heat.*"

First, create an awareness of the symptoms that employees might experience and then communicate the procedures to reduce or eliminate the harmful effects of these disorders.

- Encourage your employees to wear light colored, lightweight apparel. If uniforms are provided ensure they are not dark and of a heavy weight fabric. Cotton is preferable to synthetic fabrics.
- Ensure employee drink plenty of water or other hydrating fluids. Caffeine should be avoided.
- Encourage frequent breaks during periods of high heat and high humidity.
- Educate the employees about heat-induced illnesses and the related symptoms.
- If possible, have the employees work in teams of 2 or more.
- Perform the heaviest work in the early portion of the day.

## HEAT EXHAUSTION SYMPTOMS

- Headaches; dizziness; fatigue; vomiting; fainting; pale, clammy skin; and decreased & dark colored urine

## HEAT EXHAUSTION CARE

- First, call for help and DON'T leave the person alone.
  - Take the person to a cool, shady place and force him/her to drink plenty of liquids. If dizzy, lay him/her on their back and elevate legs. If vomiting, lay on side.
- Loosen and remove any heavy clothing.
- Attempt to cool by fanning, using a damp cloth or misting with water.

Be aware that heat exhaustion may progress to heat stroke, if not treated.

## HEAT STROKE SYMPTOMS

Dry pale hot, skin; hot red skin; nausea; vomiting; disorientation or delirium; seizures; unconsciousness; coma; shortness of breath; decreased urination; or blood in urine or stool. These symptoms occur suddenly, without any symptoms of heat exhaustion.

If a person is experiencing symptoms of heat exhaustion or heat stroke, **OBTAIN MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY**. Any delay could be fatal.

## HEAT STROKE PROCEDURES

- Cool the body while awaiting the ambulance by removing clothing and placing ice bags on the neck, in the armpits, and the groin areas. Attempt to cool by fanning, using a damp cloth or misting with water. If he/she is awake and able to swallow, give fluids.

- Other concerns: Employees with a previous history of heat related illness, overweight or those wearing respirators or protective suits are prone to increased risk of heat exhaustion/stroke.
- Typically we just think of employees that work outdoors as prone to heat exhaustion or heat stroke; yet you should also consider kitchen and laundry employees.
- An awareness of heat illness is one of the important items to keep your work force safe during hot weather. If you are one of the many operations that provide cooled towels for your golfers, why not do the same for your employees?