



Media Release - SafeWork SA

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RENEWED WARNING ON HEAT STRESS

With the current hot spell likely to persist for some days yet, SafeWork SA is renewing its warning for care to be taken to avoid the ill-effects of heat stress.

"As we've seen by the dozens of people hospitalized so far, heat stress is a very real safety issue for workplaces, given the current conditions," says SafeWork SA Executive Director, Michele Patterson.

"Under the law, employers are obliged to provide a safe working environment, and managing such an obvious hazard as hot weather is a necessary part of that duty of care.

"It's not just foundries and furnaces that are hot, temperatures in other workplaces such as industrial sheds can sometimes exceed 50 degrees, and of course the risk is ever-present in open air or outdoor workplaces such as construction sites," Ms Patterson says.

"If people continue to work on through the symptoms of heat stress, it can lead to serious illness and in extreme cases, death.

"However, working in a hot environment can also affect workers' concentration and that's when harmful incidents are more likely to occur," Ms. Patterson says.

SafeWork SA recommends the following measures be taken to avoid harm in the workplace from the ill-effects of heat:

- Alternative job planning - such as starting earlier in the day, or scheduling work so that more physically demanding tasks are done when it's cooler.
- Rotate workers who have to work in direct sunlight – doing so can help reduce the length of sun exposure for each person. Where possible, provide artificial shade such as umbrellas, shade cloth or a sunshade.
- Keep well hydrated – this is critical, and SA workplace safety laws require that fresh drinking water be provided at all workplaces.
- Adequate ventilation – wherever possible, the work environment should be ventilated by the use of fans or other means.
- UV protection - sunblock and wide-brimmed hats should be supplied as part of personal protective equipment.

[more]

Look after your workmates.



Government of South Australia

Department of the Premier
and Cabinet

Heat stress occurs when the body is unable to adequately cool itself for reasons such as: exposure to high temperatures and humidity; reduced air movement; radiant temperature of surroundings; type of clothing being worn; and the level of physical activity being undertaken.

The symptoms include: headaches; fatigue; dizziness or fainting; increased sweating; mood changes such as irritability or confusion, and possibly an upset stomach or vomiting.

If heat stress is suspected, medical assistance should be sought immediately depending on the severity of the symptoms.

First aid consists of cooling the body as quickly as possible, for example, soaking the person's clothing in cold water and increasing air movement by fanning them.

While many workplaces have hot weather policies in place, should work be called off, pay arrangements are dependant on the prevailing agreements in the businesses concerned.

For answers and advice on workplace health and safety and the relevant laws, SafeWork SA operates a telephone Help Centre on 1 300 365 255. To report serious accidents or incidents, in the workplace call 1 800 777 209