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Avoid heat stress and solar UV radiation exposure this summer

With South Australian summers renowned for being very hot and dry, SafeWork SA reminds employers to manage risks associated with heat stress and solar UV.

A recent *2016 Skin Health Australia Report* (Skin & Cancer Foundation) found that 65 per cent of workers are not provided with clothing to protect them from the sun.

“Last Summer, we nearly lost the life of a young worker to heat stress,” said SafeWork SA Executive Director Ms Marie Boland.

“Employers can minimise the risk of heat by modifying workloads and schedules to avoid the hottest times of day, rotating or sharing ‘hot tasks’ as well as increasing rest breaks and making sure rest areas in shady or cool areas are available,” Ms Boland said.

“Employers should also provide appropriate protective gear to minimise solar UV radiation exposure,” Ms Boland said.

Workers should wear loose fitting clothing covering their arms and legs, preferably made from a natural fibre, and drink cool water at regular breaks to stay hydrated.

If working indoors, minimising the impact of heat can be as simple as increasing air movement using fans and isolating workers from hot processes or items of plant.

Heat stress symptoms include feeling dizzy, weak, clumsy or disorientated. If a worker’s feeling unwell they should rest in a cool area and drink cool fluids – water ideally – and if they do not recover quickly, seek prompt medical attention.

“Look out for symptoms of heat stress and act immediately if someone appears to be affected, or tell someone straight away if you’re feeling unwell,” Ms Boland said.

Factors that contribute to heat-related stress include:

- dehydration from a poor diet, vomiting or diarrhoea as well as excessive alcohol and caffeine consumption
- existing medical conditions such as diabetes and hypertension
- medication that may affect the body’s ability to regulate temperature
- increasing age, poor physical fitness or being overweight
- new or young workers who may underestimate risks and not yet be acclimatised.

University of Adelaide researchers are currently investigating heat and the risk of work-related injuries. Anyone interested in assisting them should contact Alana.Hansen@adelaide.edu.au or telephone 8313 1043.

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SafeWork SA offers a free workplace advisory service providing practical tips and advice on work health and safety.

“A WHS advisor can visit your workplace to help you to identify hazards and risks to put in place practical safety systems that will suit your specific circumstances,” Ms Boland said.

“Our WHS advisors have no inspector powers at all so you can feel comfortable inviting them in to help you.”

Book a visit online at safework.sa.gov.au/freeadvice or call 1300 365 255.

For more tips on preventing heat related injuries visit the SafeWork SA website, safework.sa.gov.au.

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