Heat stress and solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation exposure are well-recognised work health and safety hazards for outdoor workers in hot conditions.

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 radiation.

A recent 2016 *Skin Health Australia Report* (Skin and Cancer Foundation) found that 65 per cent of workers say their employers don’t provide clothing to protect them from the sun and 74 per cent aren’t provided with sunglasses to protect their eyes.

People who work outside more than four hours a day outside, should use all four major controls for preventing solar UV radiation exposure:

1. apply sunscreen
2. wear a hat
3. wear clothes that cover the arms and legs
4. work in the shade.

Duty holders should consult, coordinate and cooperate with each other to minimise the risk of thermally stressful situations to workers through a risk management approach.

**Duty holders should:**
- identify hazards associated with working in heat
- plan ahead and ensure all practicable measures for preventing heat illness can be implemented, particularly when hot weather is predicted
- reduce the amount of time workers spend in the sun
- supply breathable clothing that cover the arms and legs e.g. loose fitting cotton
- provide sunscreen and other protective gear, and ensure workers wear it properly
- provide shade cloth or safe shelter
- provide cool / cold drinking water, close to the work area to encourage hydration
- enable workers to take regular breaks or rotate with other workers where possible
- provide training on being sun smart, and encourage workers to keep an eye on each other
- ensure workers understand the seriousness of heat stress and the point at which medical treatment becomes a matter of urgency
- most importantly, make your controls available to workers and encourage their use.

**Workers should:**
- follow all reasonable instructions from their employer
- drink enough water to remain hydrated
- check their urine colour, a darker colour can be an indication of dehydration
- look after their work mates
- take responsibility for their skins’ health by applying sunscreen, wearing a hat, wearing clothes that cover the arms and legs and working in the shade where possible
- raise any work health and safety concerns with your employer.
Tips and advice

For tips and advice on work health and safety, SafeWork SA offers a free workplace advisory service. An experienced 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.

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

To request a visit go to safework.sa.gov.au/freeadvice or call 1300 365 255

Some of the reasons workers may experience heat-related illness are:

- workers exposed to direct sunlight, especially during the hottest parts of the day with no shade relief
- workers carrying out strenuous tasks or work for sustained long periods

Factors that may contribute to heat-related problems at work include:

- workers exposed to reflected heat from construction materials, polished aluminium and glass, or heat build-up in roads and concrete structures
- workers exposed to additional heat (from machinery).

Factors that may contribute to heat-related problems at work include:

- inadequate cooling off or rest periods and insufficient water consumption
- climatic conditions (low air movement, high humidity, high air temperature and high radiant heat)
- inappropriate clothing (non-breathable materials)
- individual medication that may affect the body’s temperature regulation

Factors that may contribute to heat-related problems at work include:

- things that may cause dehydration such as poor diet, vomiting, diarrhoea or excessive alcohol and caffeine consumption
- individual medical conditions such as heart problems, diabetes and hypertension
- increasing age, poor general physical fitness or being overweight
- new workers that are not acclimatised or young workers who underestimate risks
- workers not recognising symptoms of heat related illness.

Symptoms of heat-illness:

- vomiting or nausea
- dizzy or weak
- clumsy, light headed and/or fainting.

Heat stress:

- pale, cool, clammy skin
- rapid breathing and shortness of breath
- rapid, weak pulse.

Heat stroke:

- high body temperature of 40°C or more
- flushed and dry skin
- pounding, rapid pulse.

Further information

Visit the SafeWork SA website for:

Managing the Work Environment and Facilities

Working in Hot Conditions

The Cancer Council’s sunsmart.com.au helps people play it safe in the sun.

2016 Skin Health Australia Report Card

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