

OSHA · CONSTRUCTION SAFETY

# Heat Stress National Emphasis Program 2026

Why it is important and how construction  
companies can prepare

perry  weather

 **CONSTRUCTION  
SAFETY WEEK**



# What You're Entitled To

OSHA enforces heat-hazard protection under the General Duty Clause and through targeted inspections under the 2026 Heat National Emphasis Program. The following practices are recommended by OSHA, and several states such as CA, CO, MD, MN, NV, OR, WA have additional binding heat standards.

## Cool Water

Free, potable, cool water accessible at your work area at all times. NIOSH recommends at least 1 cup every 15 minutes.

## Scheduled Rest

Rest breaks in shade or a cool enclosed area. Break frequency adjusts based on how hot conditions are.

## Shade

You should have access to shade within a short walk of where you're working.

## Acclimatization

If you're new to the job or returning after time away, it is recommended to start on a gradual heat-exposure schedule before working full duty in hot conditions.

## Training

OSHA expects both workers and supervisors to be trained on heat illness recognition, reporting, and first aid.

## Emergency Plan

A clear plan for heat emergencies — who calls 911, where the nearest ER is, how to respond on site. You should know it before it's needed.

# Protections Should Be In Place Every Day

OSHA can arrive without notice on any of these triggers. Protections need to be in place on every hot day to avoid General Duty Clause citation when an inspector arrives.

**01**

## **Heat Advisory Issued**

Any time the National Weather Service issues a heat warning or advisory for your area, OSHA can begin unannounced inspections of all targeted construction sites immediately.

**02**

## **Heat Index $\geq$ 80°F**

On any day the heat index reaches 80°F or above, any inspector already on-site for any reason is required to also assess heat hazards — and can expand scope on the spot.

**03**

## **Inspector Drives By**

Compliance officers are authorized to stop at any outdoor worksite they observe while traveling on advisory days. No appointment. No warning. Your crew working outside is fair game.

**04**

## **Worker Complaint or Incident**

Any employee complaint about lack of water, rest, or shade triggers an immediate priority inspection. Any heat-related hospitalization or fatality results in an in-person OSHA visit.

# What Heat Does to Your Body

## WHEN THE BODY'S COOLING SYSTEM FAILS

- Core temperature is normally ~98.6°F (37°C).
- During hard work in heat, the body generates more heat than it can dissipate.
- Blood shunts to the skin, heart rate climbs, sweat rate climbs.
- If humidity is high or PPE blocks evaporation, core temperature keeps rising.
- **Above ~104.9°F (40°C) core, heatstroke can occur — a medical emergency with CNS dysfunction and risk of multi-organ failure and death.**

## SIGNS OF HEAT ILLNESS WORKERS SHOULD KNOW

- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Weak pulse; pale or excessively sweaty skin
- Brief fainting or loss of consciousness
- Extreme fatigue or weakness
- Nausea or headache
- Very dark urine
- Confusion, irritability, or altered consciousness

# Recognizing Heat Illness

## MILD

### Heat Cramps

#### SIGNS:

- Muscle spasms or pain
- Usually in legs, arms, or trunk
- Heavy sweating
- Cramps may occur after work or at night

#### WHAT TO DO:

Rest in shade. Drink water or an electrolyte drink. Stretch and lightly massage the affected muscle.

## SERIOUS

### Heat Exhaustion

#### SIGNS:

- Fatigue, irritability, or thirst
- Nausea, vomiting, or dizziness
- Heavy sweating
- Elevated body temperature or fast heart rate
- Headache
- Weakness or fainting

#### WHAT TO DO:

Move to a cool area. Remove excess clothing. Apply cool, wet cloths. Sip cool water. Seek medical attention from on-site medical professional.

## CALL 911

### Heat Stroke

#### SIGNS:

- Body temperature at or above 104.9°F
- Confusion, slurred speech, or unconsciousness
- Seizures
- Heavy sweating, hot skin & rapid heart rate

#### WHAT TO DO:

Call 911 immediately. Get in contact with on-site medical professional. Cool the person fast with full body ice immersion. Do NOT give fluids. Stay with them until help arrives.

**⚠ COMMON MISCONCEPTION:** There is a misconception that individuals have dry skin when they are having a heat stroke. This is false. In most cases, they will excessively sweat. Watch for confusion or 104°F+ body temp, and excessive sweating.

# Know Your Limits — Listen to Your Body

## HEAT BUILDS WITHOUT WARNING

- You may feel fine until you don't. Heat illness can come on fast, especially when you're focused on work.
- Dehydration starts before you feel thirsty. By the time you're thirsty, you're already behind.
- Heavy PPE traps heat and blocks evaporation — your effective temperature is much higher than the air temp.
- High humidity prevents sweat from evaporating, eliminating the body's primary cooling mechanism.
- Pushing through early warning signs — headache, dizziness, nausea — dramatically increases the risk of progressing to life-threatening heat stroke.

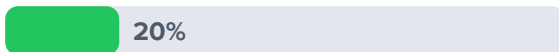
## WHEN TO STOP AND SAY SOMETHING

- **Stop working** if you feel dizzy, nauseated, confused, or unusually fatigued.
- **Tell someone** immediately — don't walk away alone or try to drive yourself.
- **Get to shade** or an air-conditioned space. Remove excess clothing if you can.
- **Drink cool water** slowly. If you can't hold fluids or you're confused, call 911.
- **Never brush it off** or let a coworker do so. Heat exhaustion becomes heat stroke. Heat stroke kills.

# Acclimatization for New Workers

## Gradual Ramp-Up Schedule

Day 1–2



Day 3–4



Day 5–6



Day 7–8



Day 9–14



*Gradual Ramp-Up Schedule (OSHA/NIOSH "Rule of 20 Percent")*

## Brand new to this job?

OSHA expects employers to put new and returning workers on a gradual heat-exposure schedule before full duty in hot conditions.

## Returning after a a few weeks off the job?

Your heat tolerance resets. Even experienced workers need to re-acclimatize after time away. Start at a reduced workload — not full duty.

## Feeling off in your first week?

Over 70% of heat-related worker deaths occur during the first week on the job, before the body has built tolerance to heat. Speak up the moment you feel symptoms.

# Daily Heat Safety Quick Reference

## How much water?

At least 1 cup (8 oz) every 15 minutes. Cool water, provided free. Don't wait until you're thirsty.

## What counts as shade?

Actual shade — trees, structures, tents. A hot vehicle does not count. Your employer must provide it.

## I'm a new hire — what do I do?

Tell your supervisor immediately. You must start on a gradual schedule. Do not take full duty in heat on day one.

## I feel dizzy or sick.

Stop work. Move to shade. Tell a coworker or supervisor. Don't brush it off and don't walk away alone.

## A coworker looks confused or won't wake up.

Call 911 now. Move them to shade. Apply ice packs to neck, armpits, groin. Stay with them. Do not give fluids if unconscious.

## My employer won't provide water or shade.

Call OSHA: 1-800-321-OSHA (6742). Reporting is protected. Retaliation is illegal — your employer cannot fire you for this.

## What is WBGT?

Wet Bulb Globe Temperature — accounts for humidity, sun, and wind, not just air temp. OSHA uses it on inspections.

## Do I wait for dry skin before calling 911?

NO. Heat stroke skin is often still wet and sweaty. Confusion, high body temp, or unconsciousness means call 911 now.

# Your Protections and Reporting Rights

## Water, Rest & Shade

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- Free, cool drinking water accessible at your work area — not just somewhere on site
- Scheduled, adequate rest breaks in shade or a cool space
- Shade accessible within a reasonable distance of your work
- OSHA enforces these protections under the General Duty

## Acclimatization

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- New workers must be gradually introduced to heat — NIOSH/ACGIH recommend 7–14 days; OSHA expects employers to follow this guidance
- Returning workers must also re-acclimatize — the directive explicitly covers both new and returning employees
- Non-compliance is citable by OSHA inspectors under the General Duty Clause

## Right to Report

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- OSHA Hotline: 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) · osha.gov
- Your identity can be kept confidential when filing a complaint
- Retaliation — firing, demotion, or threats — is illegal under federal law
- If your employer retaliates, that act itself is an OSHA violation

# The Bottom Line

*OSHA didn't create this program to generate paperwork.*

*They created it because workers are dying from heat — and most of those deaths are preventable.*

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- Water, rest, and shade are your right — every hot day, no exceptions
- If you're new or returning, insist on a proper acclimatization schedule
- Know the signs of heat illness in yourself and the person next to you
- Heat stroke skin is NOT always dry — act on confusion or high temp, not dry skin
- Know your rights. Report unsafe conditions. Retaliation is illegal.

Heat kills. Preparation saves lives.

## Primary federal sources

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *National Emphasis Program — Outdoor and Indoor Heat-Related Hazards*, Directive CPL 03-00-024 (effective April 10, 2026).
2. Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, § 5(a)(1) (General Duty Clause), 29 U.S.C. § 654.
3. Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, § 11(c) (anti-retaliation), 29 U.S.C. § 660(c).
4. 29 CFR § 1910.141; § 1915.88; § 1917.127; § 1918.95; § 1926.51; § 1928.110 (sanitation / potable water standards).

## OSHA guidance and outreach

5. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *Heat — Protecting New Workers*. [osha.gov/heat-exposure/protecting-new-workers](https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure/protecting-new-workers) (citing Tustin et al., 2018).
6. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *Heat — Overview: Working in Outdoor and Indoor Heat Environments*. [osha.gov/heat-exposure](https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure).
7. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *Heat Illness Prevention Campaign — "Water. Rest. Shade."* [osha.gov/heat](https://www.osha.gov/heat).
8. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *OSHA Technical Manual (OTM)*, TED 01-00-015, Section III, Chapter 4 — Heat Stress (September 15, 2017).

## Proposed federal rule

9. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. *Heat Injury and Illness Prevention in Outdoor and Indoor Work Settings* (proposed rule), 89 Fed. Reg. 70698 (August 30, 2024).

## Supporting consensus standards

10. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. *Criteria for a Recommended Standard: Occupational Exposure to Heat and Hot Environments*, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2016-106 (February 2016).
11. American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. *Heat Stress and Strain: TLV® Physical Agents*, 2026 ed.

## Underlying epidemiology

12. Tustin AW, et al. *Acute Kidney Injury Among Construction Workers and Heat-Related Worker Deaths Investigated by OSHA, 2017–2018*. MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 2018.
13. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Heat Illness and Death Among Workers — United States, 2012–2013*. MMWR, 63(31):661–665 (August 8, 2014).

## Weather data

14. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service. *Heat Safety*. [weather.gov/safety/heat](https://www.weather.gov/safety/heat).