HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION: INDOORS

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Heat illness is a serious medical condition resulting from the body's inability to cope with a particular heat load. The different types of heat illness include heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat syncope, and heat stroke, which can lead to death. Title 8 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 3396, Heat Illness Prevention in Indoor Places of Employment, went into effect on July 23, 2024. This standard applies whenever employees are present in any indoor working space and the temperature reaches 82°F or higher. There are a few specific exceptions, summarized below:

EXCEPTIONS TO SECTION 3396

- Employees teleworking from a location of the employee's choice, which is not under the control of the employer.
- Local detention facilities and juvenile facilities operated by a local government.
- Emergency operations that are directly involved in the protection of life or property.
- Incidental heat exposures at or above 82°F and below 95°F for less than 15 minutes in any 60-minute period. This exception does not apply to vehicles without effective and functioning air conditioning or shipping containers during loading, unloading, or related work.

SIGNS OF HEAT ILLNESS

The longer an individual goes without assistance in excessive heat, the more likely they are to become seriously ill. Individuals with heart disease or high blood pressure and those taking certain medications should take extra precautions with their heat exposure. Symptoms of heat illness include but are not limited to:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Muscle pain and spasms
- Elevated heart rate
- Heavy sweating
- Hot or dry skin
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting or unconsciousness

WHAT MUST DEPARTMENTS DO?

When the temperature in the indoor work area equals or exceeds 82°F, departments must do the following:

PROVISION OF WATER

- Provide employees access to potable drinking water free of charge.
- Water must be fresh, pure, and suitably cool; tap water is often sufficient.
- Must be located as close as practicable to the areas where employees are working and in indoor cool-down areas.
- If drinking water is not plumbed or continuously supplied, it shall be provided at the beginning of the work shift to provide one quart per employee per hour for the duration of their entire shift.

ACCESS TO COOL-DOWN AREAS

- Always provide one or more cool-down areas while employees are present.
- The area must be large enough to accommodate the number of employees on recovery or reset period so they can sit in a normal posture without any physical contact with each other.
- Must be as close as practicable to the areas where employees are working.
- The temperature in indoor cool-down areas must be less than 82°F.
- Individuals must be monitored and asked if they are experiencing symptoms of heat illness.

ACCLIMATIZATION

Departments must closely observe all employees working during a heat wave where no effective engineering controls are in use to control the effect of outdoor heat on indoor temperature. Additionally, new employees and newly assigned employees working in hot areas must be closely observed by a supervisor or designee for the first 14 days of employment when conditions reach the following:

- Work area where the temperature or heat index, whichever is greater, equals or exceeds 87°F; or
- Work area where the temperature equals or exceeds 82°F for employees who wear clothing that restricts heat removal; or
- High radiant heat area, a work area that is at least five degrees Fahrenheit greater than the temperature, where the temperature equals or exceeds 82°F.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES

Departments must implement procedures to ensure employees who are working in hot areas can maintain communication with a supervisor through voice, observation, or electronic means. Additionally, first aid measures must be administered if a supervisor observes or if an employee reports any signs or symptoms of heat illness, including contacting emergency medical services, if necessary.

In addition to the requirements above, when the temperature or heat index in the indoor work area equals or exceeds 87°F when employees are present, departments must do the following:

ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL MEASURES:

- Measure the temperature and heat index and record whichever is greater.
- Initial measurements must be taken when it is reasonable to suspect the indoor temperature or heat index exceeds 87°F.
- Additional measurements must be taken when the temperature is reasonably expected to be 10° or more above the previous measurements.

ENGINEERING CONTROLS

These are controls that remove or reduce heat or create a barrier between the employee and the heat source. Engineering controls must be used to reduce the temperature/heat index below trigger levels, or to the lowest feasible level if not possible. Examples include:

- Increasing natural ventilation by opening windows and doors when the outdoor temperature or heat index is lower than the indoor temperature and heat index.
- Cooling fans or air conditioning.
- Local exhaust ventilation at points of high heat production or moisture.
- Reflective shields to block or reduce radiant heat.
- Insulating or isolating heat sources from employees, or isolating employees from heat sources.
- Elimination of steam leaks.
- Cooled seats or benches.
- Evaporative coolers.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS

These controls are methods that limit exposure to heat by adjusting work procedures, practices, or schedules. They should only be used once all feasible engineering controls have been implemented. Examples include:

- Modify work schedules and activities to times of the day when the temperature is cooler.
- Schedule shorter shifts during heat waves.
- Gradually increase shift length over the first one to two weeks to acclimate newly hired workers.
- Require mandatory rest breaks in a cooler environment, such as a shady location or an air-conditioned building.
- Rotate job functions among workers to help minimize exertion and heat exposure.
- Require employees to work in pairs or groups during extreme heat so they can monitor each other for signs of heat illness.

PERSONAL HEAT-PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

If feasible engineering controls do not decrease the temperature enough and administrative controls do not minimize the risk of heat illness, special cooling devices that the employees wear can protect them in hot environments. Examples include:

- Water or air-cooled garments.
- Cooling vests/jackets.
- Neck wraps.
- Supplied-air personal cooling systems.
- Insulated suits.
- Heat-reflective clothing.
- Infrared-reflecting face shields.

WRITTEN PLAN

Departments must establish, implement, and maintain a written Indoor Heat Illness Prevention Plan for indoor work areas where the temperature equals or exceeds, or is likely to equal or exceed, 82 degrees Fahrenheit when employees are present.

You may access our template for “Heat Illness Prevention Plan for Indoor and Outdoor Places of Employment” by clicking here.