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LawTalk Blog



Working in hot conditions - what are your workers rights?

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Date: Monday December 21, 2020

With the summer months now upon us, its important that you and your workplace are well equipped to face hot conditions. How hot does your place of work get? Ever felt tired, weak, headachy, irritable and sweaty whilst at work?

You could be suffering from dehydration or heat exhaustion. This could impact on your ability to make effective decisions, which leads to mental errors, which can lead to poor judgment when operating plant and equipment – and we all know where that ends...

If you work outside, in a factory or drive a vehicle, particularly a heavy vehicle for work it is likely that you are regularly exposed to extremes in temperature which can result in dehydration and heat stroke.

Even working in an air-conditioned environment you still run the risk of dehydration and exposure to sudden temperature changes, from coming out of a refrigerated air-conditioned workplace on a 45 degree day, for example.

What are employer obligations on hot days?

Your employer has an obligation to provide you with a safe working environment and to carry out appropriate hazard identification audits and risk assessments. They also have an obligation to provide information and training to ensure that you are safe from injury and risks to your health. This means that your employer should be monitoring your work environment – including the temperature.

If you work in a hot environment your employer should provide you with training for how to identify and deal with dehydration and heat stress and how to avoid it and provide you with equipment to help prevent it. If this isn't happening in your workplace, speak with your employer.

What are your employee obligations when working in a hot environment?

As an employee, you have an obligation to take reasonable care of yourself at work and in cases where you are working in a hot environment you should ensure that you always have a good supply of water to prevent dehydration. Get involved with assessing hazards and risks to your health and safety and report them to your employer or your Union representative so that systems can be put in place to avoid injury.

Recommendations when working in hot conditions

The *Work Health & Safety Regulations 2012*, Regulation (No. 41) states that employers are obliged to ensure that there is drinking water available for each employee where practicable.

Drinking coffee or sugary soft drinks is not recommended; often these drinks can cause greater thirst. Choose a drink of water, or maybe a sports drink to replace essential electrolytes.

Do not drink freezing cold drinks. They can cause stomach cramps and discomfort.

Wear comfortable, loose fitting, light coloured clothing and avoid eating hot foods and heavy meals as they tend to cause an increase in body temperature.

If you are a driver, make sure your vehicle is well-maintained so as to avoid breaking down in a remote location.

It is a good idea to keep an umbrella in your vehicle. If you have to get out of your vehicle in a remote location it will provide some protection from the sun.

Dehydration - symptoms and how to prevent it

Symptoms of heat stroke/dehydration include fatigue, weakness, nausea and vomiting, headache, dizziness, muscle cramps, rashes, irritability, sweating (although in extreme cases of heat stroke you won't be able to sweat), paleness and breathing difficulties.

Always remember, if you feel thirsty, chances are you are already dehydrated. Stop what you are doing and have a drink of water.

If you do find yourself dehydrated or demonstrating symptoms of heat stroke, stop, rest and rehydrate, drink plenty of cool water, massage any muscle cramps and use a fan or cool cloth to help cool your body down.

If you feel dizzy or nauseous you should seek immediate medical treatment.

If you are concerned about the temperature at your workplace, get a digital thermometer and record the temperature and report it to your employer, co-workers and your Union.

What happens if you suffer an injury as a result of heat exposure?

If you do suffer an injury as a result of heat exposure, you may be entitled to lodge a claim for [workers compensation](#). You should always report injuries to your employer and your General Practitioner if you have any concerns and if you are not satisfied with the response you can [seek assistance](#) from an [Andersons Employment & Industrial Law](#) solicitor.

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