



WORKING IN HOT WEATHER

There is no law which says at what temperature work should stop. However, every employer has a duty of care at the least, to “ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all the workers.”

Following the death of a 38 year old man in Queensland in 2013, the Queensland Coroner recommended that -

“the construction industry to set a temperature level for halting heavy outdoor work in extreme heat in a bid to prevent worker deaths.”

Between 2005 and 2014, 13 workers died in Australia from being exposed to ‘environmental heat’ - five were in Queensland.

When work cannot be rescheduled or artificial cooling provided then the AMWU recommends a regime of rest breaks in cool areas with cool drinks. The temperatures for rest breaks will vary depending upon usual temperatures and whether workers are acclimatised. To minimise the risks, the temperature needs to be constantly monitored.

For southern areas – due to variable climate many workers are not acclimatized.

30 to 32 degrees Celsius	10 minutes rest every hour
32 to 35 degrees Celsius	15 minutes rest every hour
35 to 38 degrees Celsius	30 minutes rest hour
Over 38 degrees Celsius	Rest in a ventilated area until less than 38 degrees Celsius or go home

For hotter parts of the country

Above 36 degrees Celsius	10 minutes rest every hour
Above 38 degrees Celsius	15 minutes rest every hour
Above 40 degrees Celsius	30 minutes rest hour
Over 42 degrees Celsius	45 minutes break every hour and no more than 2 hours at this temperature

The Queensland Government has produced a useful tool to help workplaces decide if action is required to prevent heat stress.

<https://fswgap.worksafe.qld.gov.au/etools/etool/heat-stress-basic-calculator-test/>

As the temperature rises, the likelihood of workers’ health suffering increases.

Hot temperatures cause discomfort and hazards such as:

- Reduced concentration (and increased likelihood of accidents)
- Increased discomfort in use of protective clothing and equipment
- Aggravation of effects of other hazards, e.g. noise
- Aggravation of pre-existing illnesses
- Heat stress, exhaustion and fainting.

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Heat discomfort is felt at 30 deg. C and all efforts should be taken by employers to keep temperatures below this level or to provide conditions for outdoor workers that help reduce the effects of seasonal hot conditions where the temperature exceeds 30 deg. C.

Both indoor and outdoor work areas measures to be taken should include:

- providing air-conditioned rest rooms
- changing the rate of work e.g. taking longer
- providing lighter alternative work
- use of air-circulating fans
- use of shade cloths
- use of trees to shade buildings and outdoor areas
- provision of constant supplies of cool drinking water.

It is much better to talk to your employer when the weather is cool than on the actual hot day. **So get it agreed to when the negotiating time is on your side, in winter.**

It is important to remember that some people may have physical or medical health conditions, making them more susceptible to hot conditions. Emergency operations require special consideration.

As the temperature rises the body becomes less able to cope with the strain, serious health risks such as:

Heat Cramps: These are painful cramps in the legs and arm muscles, the back and the stomach. They are due in part to *excessive loss* of salt during sweating.

Heat Rash: Skin rashes over arms, shoulders and chest and behind the knee often associated with a tingling or prickly feeling are a sign of excessive heat exposure.

Heat Exhaustion: This happens when the body loses too much water too quickly.

The blood pumped to the skin for cooling purposes depletes the brain of sufficient blood and this can cause fainting. The signs are heavy sweating (clammy skin), vomiting, paleness, dizziness, low temperature, tiredness and a weak pulse.

Heat Stroke This occurs when the body is no longer able to control its internal temperature. Because sweating stops, a high fever results that can lead to damage to organs such as the brain, liver and kidneys.

If at any time someone is suffering from heat stress they must immediately report to and be given first aid. Symptoms can include staggering, confusion, hot skin, convulsions, delirious and up to unconsciousness or death.

Thirst is not a reliable guide for dehydration. It's essential to drink especially when working or exercising in the heat. Drink water, not energy or sports drinks. Urine that is light yellow is a good indication that you're getting enough fluid.