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Hot weather precautions for the workplace

Spring and summer means the return of hot weather, and heat stress can be a serious threat to workplace safety. Prevention is always the best way to deal with heat-related safety issues, but when hot weather strikes, it's important to know proper response procedures in the event of heat-related injury or illness. TDCJ provides annual training to unit staff and offenders regarding the prevention, recognition and treatment of heat-related illness and once again urges staff to be alert for signs of heat stress in themselves and others.

As temperatures rise, so does the likelihood of illness and injury. Sweaty hands can cause your hands to slip and sweat in your eyes can obstruct your vision. Beware of surface heating hazards like asphalt and metal; don't test their temperature by touch, it takes only a moment to get a contact burn. Sunburn is a common problem which can be avoided by using protective suntan lotion and dressing in lightweight, shade-producing clothing. A brimmed hat is a necessity for anyone working outside in the sun.

Our bodies can usually maintain a healthy temperature through blood circulation and



perspiration, but both of these cooling mechanisms can be overwhelmed by very high temperatures and humidity. Heat stress can cause you to feel weak, nauseated and confused. If untreated, heat stress can easily lead to a serious medical emergency. Always be sure to drink lots of fluids, preferably water, and avoid caffeinated and sugary drinks.

Learn to recognize the signs of heat stress and be prepared to respond with quick treatment.

- **HEAT RASH** is a skin irritation which looks like tiny bumps surrounded by areas of redness. It normally occurs on the neck and chest, in the groin, under the breasts and in elbow creases. Keep the affected area as cool and dry as possible.
- **HEAT CRAMPS** usually develop after hours of work or exercise in humid con-

ditions when the body cannot cool itself through perspiration. Cramps are brief and abrupt, intermittent, and can be severe. Rest in a cool area and replace fluids with cool, caffeine-free liquids. Don't give liquids to a person who is unconscious or not alert. If the subject does not improve within 30 minutes, seek medical attention.

- **HEAT EXHAUSTION**, or heat prostration, is caused by an electrolyte imbalance. Symptoms include weakness, anxiety, dizziness, headache, nausea and sometimes vomiting. The subject may perspire heavily, lack coordination, appear gray, have a rapid pulse and be cool to the touch. Seek medical help immediately. Rest the victim in a cool area, replace fluids and electrolytes, and remove the victim's shirt and shoes.
- **HEAT STROKE** may be preceded by heat exhaustion, but the onset of heat stroke is often sudden. Physical collapse of the victim may be the first sign of a problem. Symptoms include hot and dry skin, rapid pulse, headache and weakness, lack of coordination, nausea and

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vomiting, followed by unconsciousness, shock and death. Seek medical help immediately. Move the victim to a cool, air-conditioned place, remove their clothing and cool them using a water spray and fans.

Exposure to heat and humidity is often unavoidable for agency staff and offenders, so it's important to minimize the impact of summer temperatures by drinking plenty of fluids, monitoring for warning signs of heat stress in yourself and others, and seeking immediate medical help should anyone show symptoms of heat-related illness. ●