BCTF Advice on Heat Stress and Reporting Process 2023

Heat stress

Our bodies naturally maintain a temperature between 36C and 38C. Sweating cools our bodies down, but if you work in a hot environment this might not be enough. If your body heats up faster than it can cool itself, you experience heat stress. This can lead to serious heat disorders and potential injury.

As a worker's body heats up, it loses fluids and salt through sweat. As workers dehydrate, they are less able to cool themselves down. Workers in a hot environment should be aware of these warning signs of heat stress: excessive sweating, dizziness, and nausea. If heat stress is not recognized and treated early, it can lead to heat disorders, which have serious effects on the body. These include heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.

For more information on these heat disorders use this link:
www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/hazards-exposures/heat-stress

Reporting process

1. Report the issue/concern to your principal. Also, report the issue to the school health and safety rep, the site-based joint occupational health and safety committee (JOHSC).
2. Document the response and steps taken by the principal.
3. If the issue is not resolved, then a health and safety rep or a member of the site-based JOHSC can contact:

   WorkSafeBC Prevention Information Line
   (Canada):1.888.621.7233 (1.888.621.SAFE)
   Monday to Friday 8:05 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

4. It is recommended that your local union president is kept apprised of the situation.

Hierarchy of controls for heat stress

The most effective way to reduce the risk of heat stress is to eliminate the source of exposure. If that's not possible, there are other risk controls to use.

1) **Elimination or substitution**

   Eliminating the hazard by substituting a safer process or material, where possible, is the most effective control. A question to consider:

   - Can the job be done in a cooler environment?

2) **Engineering controls**

   Making physical modifications to facilities, equipment and processes can reduce exposure.

   Some questions to consider:

   - Can ventilation be improved?
   - Can hot surfaces be insulated or covered to reduce radiant heat?
   - Can shields and barriers be installed to protect workers from heat?
   - Can humidity be reduced?

3) **Administrative controls**

   Changing work practices and work policies, awareness tools, and training can limit the risk of heat stress. Some questions to consider:

   - Can warning signs be posted in the work area?

- Can cool-down rooms be provided?
- Can workers be acclimated to heat?
- Can water be provided?

4) **Personal protective equipment**

This is the least effective control. It must always be used in addition to at least one other control. Some questions

- Has personal protective equipment been tested to make sure it is working properly?