

FLASH REPORT!

Cal/OSHA Issues Heat Warning

California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) have activated the Heat Illness Prevention Network, with forecasts of high heat throughout the state in coming days.

Employers are encouraged to allow workers to acclimate to the heat and take other heat illness prevention measures, such as providing ample water, cool areas for rest breaks when needed, emergency procedures in case a worker gets sick, and training for all hands on recognizing and responding to heat illness.

The National Weather Service has issued an Excessive Heat Watch for the San Francisco Bay Area for May 14 and 15, and is anticipating possible record temperatures in the Sacramento area. Other parts of the state likely will feel the heat as well. "It's supposed to be significantly hotter and could go on through Friday and beyond," DOSH Chief Len Welsh said in a conference call May 13. "It could go triple digits in the Bay Area."

The first heat wave of the year poses a special threat, since workers aren't used to the high temperatures. "People are not physiologically ready for the heat," he said. "We can't work people for too long at any one time." Welsh urged employers to consider shorter work schedules and planning their work days around the heat, such as starting earlier and knocking off at mid-morning, then resuming as the weather cools.

Other precautions include:

- Providing cool, shady areas at work sites so workers can take rest breaks of at least five minutes. Employees should not wait until they feel sick to take a break, and supervisors should encourage workers to rest. "A lot of small breaks are better than a long one," Welsh added.
- Making readily available plenty of cool, "inviting" water. "I strongly recommend providing ice," Welsh urged. "Keep the water nice and cool." The outdoor heat illness prevention standard requires employers to provide enough water so each worker can drink at least four cups of water per hour.
- Use a buddy system, and avoid allowing workers to go off by themselves to perform a task. Train workers to watch their colleagues for symptoms of heat illness, and know how to respond. Training for supervisors is critical, Welsh noted. They're the ones who make the whole system work.
- Be prepared for an emergency: Symptoms such as profuse sweating, skin that is extremely hot or cold to the touch, dizziness or nausea, constitute a medical emergency. First-aid trained workers should respond and emergency services should be summoned immediately. "Call 911 if you have to," Welsh said, but make sure operators have clear instructions when being called to a remote work site.

Even if you don't have a formal heat illness prevention program in place right now, it's not too late to get employees critical information. Tailgate training sessions before shifts can inform workers about where water will be available, who is responsible for obtaining ice cubes to cool it, and other information.

"Let's not be penny wise and pound foolish," Welsh urged employers. One heat illness case is something an employer will never forget. "Just the fact that somebody got sick on your watch and died is something you'll remember for the rest of your life."

The Heat Illness Prevention Network was launched last year by the California Chamber of Commerce, California Farm Bureau Federation, and California Manufacturing and Technology Association, in

cooperation with Cal/OSHA, to warn employers about impending heat emergencies. DOSH manages the system. To join, send an email to communications@dir.ca.gov.

A number of heat illness prevention resources can be found on the DOSH web site, at www.dir.ca.gov/dosh, as well as the *Cal-OSHA Reporter* site, www.cal-osha.com.