CFMEU

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SAFETY ALERT

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2017

UPDATED QUEENSLAND HEATWAVE

A heatwave has been forecast for most of Queensland over the coming week/s. Temperatures are set to soar to as high as 40 degrees for Central parts of Queensland. Please enact the BTG Heat Stress Policy to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all workers.

Why is working in the heat bad for your health?

Human beings need to maintain a constant body temperature if they are to stay healthy. Working in high temperatures will induce heat stress when more heat is absorbed into the body than can be dissipated out. Heat illness such as prickly heat, fainting from heat exhaustion or heat cramps are visible signs that people are working in unbearable heat. In the most severe cases, the body's temperature control system breaks down altogether and body temperature rises rapidly. This is heat stroke, which can be fatal.

Control measures

- Measures employed on site to prevent the effects of Heat Stress;
- Providing canopies or awnings over sections of the site where work is currently being carried out or at least over the water cooler gathering points, to shield workers from the ultra-violet rays of the sun, as well as from the direct heat of the sun.
- Providing regular rest breaks. A ten minute break every hour, in a cooler area, helps the body to cool off, especially where the work is hard, physical work. The length of the break should be increased if the temperature is very high. As a practical guideline, the following measures can be followed in most workplaces: When temperatures are expected to be greater than 30 degrees it is recommended that workers work an eight hour day.
- Providing air-conditioned sheds. These must obviously be near each area where work is being done, or break time will be spent walking to and from the shed. Also, the nearer the shed, the more likely it is to be used.
- Provision of cold (non-alcoholic) drinks. Frequent small drinks of cooled water will help replace the water lost to your body through sweat, before dehydration begins. This is better than infrequent large drinks. Again, the cold water supplies should be near each working position, to encourage frequent drinks. Large drink vessels distributed through the site to supplement the hard wired water coolers will also be a requirement in

hot weather.
- Workers shall have easy access to cool, clean drinking water.
- Caffeinated drinks should be avoided as they promote dehydration.
- Mist busters will be deployed for dust suppression and aid in worker comfort in earthworks zones.
- Reduce physical activity/ tasks where possible.
- Rotation of workers
- Work in cooler parts of the day.
- Utilise Shaded areas.
- Reduction of PPE, where permissible.
- Wear light clothing under coveralls.
- Individuals should seek medical advice on the effect of medication being taken and communicate with the PCBU/First Aid Officer if they believe necessary.
- In addition, rest breaks as needed by an individual. Individuals should not be discouraged from taking needed rest breaks.
- It is expected mandated breaks of 'smoko' and lunch be strictly adhered to.
- Training

Recommendations

The CFMEU has developed and implemented a heat stress policy setting the maximum temperature for working in direct sunlight and humidity based on the coroners' recommendations from the Glen Newport fatality. The CFMEU recommend cessation of work when temperature reaches 35 degrees or 28 degrees and 75% humidity.

Incident response/ First Aid

Ambulance must be called for anyone identified with heat stress. All heat stress incidents are to be reported to first aid and the PCBU's. Employees experiencing symptoms of heat stress must report to the first aid shed and receive medical attention. If unable to walk to the shed, normal first aid procedures will apply.

Supporting Evidence for recommendations

Coroners Recommendation: I recommend that any future industry-wide code of practice should be based on a quantitative assessment of climate, including an ultimate cut-off temperature at which work must cease. Qualitative measures may be implemented in support of such quantitative measures, but quantitative measures should be in place. It follows that work sites should have appropriate equipment and personnel to measure temperature and humidity.

Researcher Recommendation: Dr Liz Hanna from the Australian National University said research showed people overestimated the temperatures at which they could function as they would normally. She said that was a good reason to have a regulated temperature cut-off at which work stops. Particularly when people have got motivation to do so – so that could be pressure to finish a job, that could be pressure from colleagues to keep going (like) 'don't be a wuss' and employers insisting that it 'has to be done'.

References

Canadian Centre for Occupation Health & Safety
Workplace heat stress, health and productivity – an increasing challenge for low and middle-income countries during climate change - Tord Kjellstrom, Ingvar Holmer, and Bruno Lemke
United States Department of Labor – Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)
Heat Stress Awareness Guide - Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario (OHSCO)
WorkCover NSW - Code of Practice on managing the work environment and facilities
Dr Peggy Trompf – Industrial Health Matters

For any further advise please contact OHS Coordinators Royce Kupsch on 0411 636 414 or Andrew Ramsay on 0400 544 430.

Authorised by M. Ravbar Divisional Branch Secretary CFMEU Q/NT Construction & General Division