

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Cleaning industry - Heat stress

What is heat stress?

Heat stress occurs when the body heats up faster than it can cool down. If a person gets too hot, they can experience a variety of symptoms, from mild symptoms such as an itchy, red skin rash through to severe health effects like heat stroke, which can be fatal.

What can cause someone to get too hot while cleaning?

There are a number of factors in the cleaning industry that can contribute to heat stress, including:

- heat generated inside the body by doing physically hard work (e.g. lifting and carrying heavy equipment)
- working in or near high heat areas (e.g. near furnaces)
- wearing clothing or personal protective equipment (e.g. aprons) that doesn't allow the body to cool down
- environmental factors (e.g. high air temperature, lack of breeze)
- working after hours when air conditioning is shut down
- UV exposure when working outdoors.

How can heat related problems be prevented?

The best way to prevent heat related problems is to reduce the sources of heat in the workplace. Some ways to do this include:

- make jobs physically easier by automating jobs or providing mechanical aids (e.g. robotic auto scrubbers or moving equipment on trolleys)

- improve ventilation or air-conditioning
- shield hot processes.

If these are not possible, then modifying work schedules and other administrative changes can be made such as:

- limit the amount of time people have to spend in hot or humid areas
- schedule breaks in cool areas where people can take off personal protective equipment
- schedule hot jobs for cooler parts of the day
- develop procedures for the treatment of heat affected people
- train people to recognise the signs of heat stress and the steps they should take to prevent it.

Workers should also be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids, as most heat illnesses are caused by dehydration. In hot conditions or when doing heavy work, people can sweat about a litre an hour. It is recommended that people drink 150-200 millilitres of cool fluid (preferably water) every 15-20 minutes. Thirst shouldn't be relied on as an indication of when to have a drink, as by the time someone feels thirsty, they are already partly dehydrated.

For more information on managing heat stress and other workplace health and safety issues call 1300 369 915 or visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

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