



Preventing Heat Stress-Tool Box Talk 3

Although summer heat is the largest cause of heat distress disorder, it may also occur when workers are exposed to confined areas such as pipelines, shipboard spaces with limited ventilation, and any confined area involving welding or cutting.

Symptoms

The symptoms of heat stress disorders are very slow to start, but increase in intensity if precautions are not taken. The onset of the initial symptoms are mild and usually involve headaches, thirst, and tiredness.

Heat stress can move to heat stroke, a life-threatening medical emergency, quickly when the body's natural cooling system breaks down and causes the body core temperature to rise and overheat the brain. Some of the symptoms of heat stroke are immense thirst, severe headaches, disorientation, dry/hot skin (no sweating) and possibly collapse.

Treatment/Prevention

The following ideas may aid in combating heat stress disorders:

1. Employees accustomed to working in the heat are better candidates for job assignments where heat stress disorders may occur.
2. Until employees acclimate to the high temperatures, allow them to take frequent breaks to cool down.
3. Employees should be rotated from the exposure area to a non-exposure area on a regular basis to help in avoiding heat stress symptoms.
4. Employees should be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids (water, Gatorade, Powerade, etc.) to replace electrolytes.

Employees should not drink any carbonated beverages (Coke, Pepsi, etc.) as these only increase dehydration and give a false sense of being properly hydrated. Also, the use of alcohol the evening before the work shift, can lead to dehydration even before heat exposure.

If an employee appears to be suffering from heat stress disorder, remove him or her from the heat and provide a cool, shaded place to rest. If the employee is disoriented or non-responsive, call for medical attention immediately.

The goal is to recognize the hazards and symptoms of heat stress disorders and stop them before they occur. Remember, there is no better cure than prevention, and heat stress disorders can occur in winter as well as summer.