

OSHA Issues a Heat Hazard Alert

On July 27, 2023, OSHA issued a [heat hazard alert](#) to remind employers of their obligation to protect workers against heat illness or injury in outdoor and indoor workplaces.

In addition, OSHA stated it will increase its enforcement where workers are exposed to heat hazards. This will include increased inspections in high-risk industries like construction and agriculture.

Employers have a duty to protect workers by reducing and eliminating hazards that expose workers to heat illness or injury.” –Assistant OSHA Secretary Doug Parker

The heat hazard alert comes as President Joe Biden announces new actions to protect workers from extreme heat and new investments to protect communities; historically high temperatures are breaking records and exposing millions of people to the serious dangers of heat in the workplace.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that since 2011, 436 people have died due to workplace heat exposure, with an annual average of 38 deaths between 2011 to 2019. In addition, an average of 2,700 cases involving heat illnesses lead to days lost

at work, putting an additional economic burden on workers and employers.

Statistics show that people who work in conditions without adequate climate control face higher risks of hazardous heat exposure and that these situations disproportionately expose people of color to hazardous heat.

OSHA Heat Rule

In October 2021, OSHA published an [advance notice of proposed rulemaking](#) for heat injury and illness prevention in outdoor and indoor work settings.

OSHA has stated that it is taking appropriate measures to better protect workers in extreme heat while it works on proposing a rule to protect workers from heat illness.

Heat Hazard Alert

OSHA uses hazard alerts to provide specific information on safety and health hazards to employers, workers and other stakeholders. An alert describes the hazard and offers recommendations on how hazardous exposures can be eliminated or reduced and what actions employers should take to protect employees. The recent alert issued for heat illness or injury in outdoor and indoor workplaces does the following:

- Highlights what employers can and should be doing now to protect employees
- Ensures employees are aware of their rights, including protections against retaliation
- Highlights the steps OSHA is currently taking to protect workers

- Directs employers, employees and the public to crucial OSHA resources, including guidance and fact sheets on heat

For more risk management resources, contact us today.

OSHA's Current Heat Protections

As the rulemaking process for a proposed heat-specific workplace standard continues, OSHA protects workers from excess heat in the workplace by taking the following actions:

- Developing an enforcement initiative on heat-related hazards
- Launching a National Emphasis Program on heat inspections
- Creating the National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health's (OSH) Heat Injury and Illness Prevention Work Group to understand challenges and share best practices to protect workers
- Launching a Heat Illness Prevention campaign to educate employers and workers on the dangers of working in the heat

Staying Safe in Extreme Heat

By law, employers are responsible for providing workplaces free of known safety hazards, including extreme heat. Employers must:

- Provide workers with water, shade and rest.
- Allow new or returning workers to gradually increase workloads and take more frequent breaks during the first week of work as they build a tolerance for working in the heat.
- Plan for emergencies and train workers on prevention.
- Monitor workers for signs of illness.

Conclusion

OSHA may increase monitoring employer efforts to keep their workers safe during the heat hazard alert. When no specific standard applies, OSHA may use the OSH Act's general duty clause to protect worker safety. As a result, employers should review and implement their heat illness or injury policies and procedures during extreme heat conditions.