



# The Long Hot Days of Summer

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Summer is gone and the leaves on the trees are beginning to turn their fall colors. Our children are heading back to school and our vacation trips are now just a memory. As we look back on this past summer, it is one that we will not soon forget. The sizzling temperatures across the nation set many records. The Southwestern United States was hit with these temperatures for weeks. The increase in humidity made it that more unbearable for us not only when we worked but, also when we were at home or play. This heat wave then moved across the U.S. and hit the rest of the nation leaving them in the stranglehold of this strange occurrence with little relief from the blistering heat.

In a previous article, I wrote about Cal-OSHA's Emergency Standard on Heat Illness (§3395. Heat Illness Prevention). During the heat wave, the Heat illness Standard has become a permanent regulation in the State of California. Some people could ask the question, I don't live in California so how does this benefit me? Under the new standard Cal-OSHA defines heat illness as follows: "Heat Illness means a serious medical condition resulting from the body's inability to cope with a particular heat load, and includes heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat syncope and heat stroke (<http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3395.html>)". Cal-OSHA has the responsibility to protect workers in all industries in the state. One of the occupations that most notably suffers from this medical condition are the people who work in the agricultural sector. These people spend their days in the fields picking crops and other forms of hard labor to provide food and other materials used around the nation. After numerous injuries and deaths experienced by these workers, Cal-OSHA had to find the cause and cure for this problem. Their answer for this situation is the Heat Illness Standard. Through their efforts they were able to zero in on finding the best solutions for people who are exposed to high temperatures. Whether we are at work or at play the effects of heat on our body can lead to the medical conditions described in the definition. Just a simple understanding of how this could affect us in our daily lives could save you or someone you know from encountering the results of exposure to high heat.

There are different influences that we must consider to protect ourselves such as environmental factors as well as personal factors. Environmental factors may include temperature, relative humidity, workload, other sources of heat (radiant and conductive), air temperature, air movement, or exposure to direct sun light. Personal factors may include your age, health, degree of acclimatization, consumption of water, alcohol, caffeine or prescription drugs.

Here are some indicators to watch for when exposed to high heat:

Nausea, dizziness, head aches, blurred vision, cold and clammy skin as well as disorientation. Any of these symptoms may suggest that you or your co-worker have been exposed to heat related problems. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it is suggested that you rest in a cool place away from direct sunlight. Re-hydrate with water or Gatorade (isotonic drinks) and depending on the severity of the problem seek medical attention. In severe cases you may experience chills, euphoria, dry skin, rapid shallow breathing or convulsions. These examples require immediate medical attention and removal from the heat source. Lack of hydration can lead to serious problems with the bodies vital organs.

Here are some suggestions for you to consider that can protect you from exposure to high heat:

- It is suggested that you drink 8 ounces of water per hour. Two gallons of water are not uncommon when you are exposed to a high heat environment. If you are thirsty you may already be experiencing exposure to heat;
- Do not drink alcohol or caffeinated drinks as this affects the body's ability to cope with high heat;
- Take breaks from work in cool places such as shaded areas away from direct heat. The inside of an automobile does not work since the ambient temperature inside may be higher than the ambient temperature;
- If you or your co-worker experience chills, euphoria, dry skin, rapid shallow breathing or convulsions you should seek immediate medical attention.

I encourage you to read the new standard located at <http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3395.html> or the Industry Wide Labor/Management Safety Committees Safety Bulletin #35 located at [http://www.csatf.org/pdf/35HOT\\_TEMPS.pdf](http://www.csatf.org/pdf/35HOT_TEMPS.pdf) for more information on Heat Illness.