Preventing Heat Stress

(Safety Brief)

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PACIF has developed Safety Briefs to help municipal highway supervisors maintain a high level of safety and hazard awareness among employees. We recommend using these short "tailgate trainings" on a regular basis – and **at least once a month**. If you need a particular safety topic, please contact us at losscontrol@vlct.org.

Information for Supervisors

When the weather finally turns to summer after a long winter and spring, employees are often not yet conditioned to the heat. This means that these employees are at risk for heat-related injuries, especially if a very hot day hits early in the season. Conditions such as heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke are all possible. Weather conditions that are both hot AND humid pose an even greater risk for heat-related injuries.

Do your part by discussing ways to prevent these heat-related injuries with your employees – and by always making sure that adequate drinking water is provided at job sites, as required by VOSHA.

Talking Points for Training

The most important ways to reduce the potential for a heat-related injury is to encourage the following best practices when weather turns hot and humid:

- When hot weather sets in, consider whether employees have had a chance to "get acclimated". It is a fact that the body adapts to hot weather, though this process can take 2-3 weeks.
- Do most of the heavy physical labor early in the morning when temperatures are cooler. Avoid doing physically demanding tasks during the hottest part of the day (typically noon to 3 PM during the summer) whenever possible.

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- Consider the employee's physical condition and fitness when making work assignments. Individuals that are significantly overweight or who have other health issues are at increased risk for heat-related injury.
- Remind employees to wear light colored clothing. This absorbs less heat and keeps the employee cooler.
- Remind employees to regularly consume cool drinking water. Avoid caffeinated beverages as this causes the body to lose more water. Sports drinks such as PowerAde and Gatorade are acceptable, but generally water is best.
- Take periodic breaks to let employees cool down and to hydrate. Ideally they should be drinking liquids even when they are not thirsty, since thirst occurs after dehydration. Find a shady or cooler area to do this when possible.

Signs and symptoms of heat-related injury include:

1. **Muscle Cramps** – This is an early sign of dehydration. Have the employee drink water or sports drink and cool down.
2. **Heat Exhaustion** – This is a more significant heat injury where the employee is sweating excessively and may have nausea, dizziness, or a headache. Make sure the person stops working, hydrates, and cools down. This may take a while.
3. **Heat Stroke** – This can include symptoms such as confusion, lack of sweating, fainting, or seizures. Request emergency medical services and cool the employee down until help arrives. This is a serious situation!

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1.

Safety Training Attendance Roster

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Trainer:	Training Date:
1.	9.
2.	10.
3.	11.
4.	12.
5.	13.
6.	14.
7.	15.
8.	16.

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