

Toolbox Talk

Feeling the Heat

Summer's glare is hitting all of Manitoba soon. We've had short spurts, here and there, but the real scorching season is approaching at a rapid pace.

Now don't get me wrong, there's a lot to enjoy about the summer – family barbeques, days on the beach and summer carnivals among them; but working outdoors exposes you to a number of dangers, ranging from dehydration to sun burns.

Take for example a report that came from EHS Today. Writer Sandy Smith reported on the death of a North Carolina worker - a tobacco harvester who had been working three straight days in the hot sun. The heat index for the day ranged from 86-112 Fahrenheit (30 – 44.4 Celsius). When the individual arrived at a local hospital for care, his core temperature was 108 Fahrenheit.

The above scenario enforces the need for proper precautions when working outdoors. The damage from the heat can range from immediate (such as the case above) or longterm, as in the case of skin cancer. Often, we're lackadaisical when protecting ourselves from the sun's harmful rays, both on and off the job site; but the risk is high enough that you should take all precautions, especially during working hours.

The best advice comes from WorkSafe Victoria in Australia, where skin cancer accounts for 80 per cent of all newly diagnosed cases of cancer, with 95 to 99 per cent of these cases are attributable to sun exposure:

Re-organizing work

Where practical, scheduling should be done with minimal work during peak heat hours. WorkSafe Victoria advises:

- Minimize the amount of outdoor work.
- Move jobs undercover.
- Do outdoor tasks in the early morning or late in the day.
- Share outdoor and indoor work to minimize individual exposure.

Using shade

Whenever work is done outdoors, look to opportunities for shade protection. Examples of shade structures include awnings, shade umbrellas, structures that use roofing materials or shade cloth.

It's important to remember, though, that outdoor workers are also exposed to indirect UV radiation with reflection from surrounding surfaces, including concrete, glass, metal, sand and water. Thus, sun protection remains vital, even in shaded areas.

Protective clothing

When selecting clothing, be sure to find pieces that cover as much skin as possible, fit and are comfortable. Be aware of fabrics that have protection ratings. Remember – the general rule with clothing is that UV radiation will penetrate if light can be seen through it.

Though not practical, the best scenario is long-sleeve shirts and long pants; but as a realistic alternative, ensure all shirts go to at least the elbow. It is always recommended that individuals wear long pants.

Hats

Additional protection from the sun is a necessity for the face, ears and neck when wearing a hard hat. Accessories such as broad brims or Legionnaire covers are available. Outside the work site, find a regular cap (non-trucker) with a wide brim to cover as much area as possible. Remember that this will only protect from direct sunlight.

Sunglasses

We often forget that damage to our eyes can also result from the sun. close-fitting, wraparound glasses will provide the best protection. For situations where safety glasses are required, ensure that you are using tinted or clear glasses that offer UV protection and meet CSA standards.

Sunscreen

The message continues to be important. Apply, and reapply. Be sure also to apply 20 minutes ahead of outdoor work to ensure your skin properly absorbs the lotion.

Remember, though, that sunscreen by itself is not an all-out protector. It does not provide 100% protection.

References

EHS Today – “Keeping Your Cool in the Summertime” http://ehstoday.com/health/keeping-your-cool-summertime?NL=OH-05&Issue=OH-05_20150514_OH-05_682&sfvc4enews=42&cl=article_1_b&utm_rid=CPG03000003593840&utm_campaign=5204&utm_medium=email

Cancer Council Australia – “Skin Cancer” - <http://www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/skin-cancer.html>

For the Record

Date of Meeting: _____

Location: _____ Start Time: _____ Finish Time: _____

Topic: _____ Meeting Leader: _____

In Attendance (please print first & last names):
