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# Health & Safety

## TEMPERATURE EXTREMES/HEAT

### Who is at risk?

CSEA members who work in boiler rooms, kitchens, laundries, and even office buildings can be exposed to an environment which is too hot for their comfort and, more importantly, their health.

### Health effects

In addition to creating discomfort, high temperatures and humidity can cause serious health problems. Common hazards include heat stroke, heat exhaustion, and heat cramps.

Heat stroke is a serious medical emergency, requiring quick action. Untreated it can be fatal. This disorder can be recognized by elevated body temperature; hot, dry skin with red or blue blotches; mental confusion; fainting or coma.

Heat exhaustion, or heat collapse, is a common disorder and comes on quickly. Characteristically, the victim may feel weak, dizzy, nauseated, or faint.

Heat cramps are painful muscle spasms affecting the muscles of the arms, legs and stomach. These happen most often in workers whose salt intake does not replace what they lose through excessive sweating.

### Measuring heat

The temperature of the air taken with a regular weather thermometer is only one factor in measuring how hot the workplace is. Other factors that affect how the body reacts to heat include:

- Humidity
- Nearness to heat source
- Air circulation
- Level of physical exertion required A special thermometer called a wet-bulb globe thermometer makes measurements that take into account temperature, humidity and air movement.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) uses the following guidelines in determining how hot a workplace is:

- A "hot" environment is any place with a wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) over 79 degrees (76 degrees for women).
- For an employee doing moderate work for 45 minutes out of every hour, the WBGT should not be more than 82-85 degrees.

### Standard

There are no OSHA standards for heat stress on the job.

### Group risks

Certain groups of people have a greater risk than others of developing complications related to heat stress and should avoid working in hot environments. Among these are the elderly, pregnant women, diabetics, alcoholics, and people with heart disease.

### How to control heat exposure

- Shields or insulation can isolate operations from other work areas.
- Air conditioners in work areas, rest areas or lunch rooms help cool the body.
- Local ventilation can draw heat or steam away from the work.
- Dehumidifiers can decrease the amount of moisture and humidity in the air.
- Make sure you drink enough water to equal the amount of sweat produced. A worker can lose up to three gallons of fluid a day through sweating.
- Dress properly for the environment. Clothing should be loose fitting and preferably of 100% cotton to help evaporation.

### How to avoid heat exposure in office buildings

If the temperature in your office building ever exceeds those listed in the NIOSH guidelines, you should consider taking the following action:

- STEP 1** - Immediately notify your supervisor of the problem.
- STEP 2** - Request that you be temporarily relocated to another area or office until the problem with the heat is corrected.
- STEP 3** - If you cannot be temporarily relocated to another area or office, you should be allowed to leave the workplace and go home on Administrative Time Off (ATO).
- STEP 4** - If your supervisor fails to either temporarily relocate you or allow you to leave on ATO, you should contact your local CSUEU job steward or labor relations representative immediately. You should never use your own personal sick leave or vacation credits during this situation. ATO should always be used on your timecard.

### CAUTION

Heat disorders are serious. The hazards can be indoors at any time of the year. Knowing how to spot them quickly and knowing what to do about relieving them, can help safeguard your health and well-being and that of your co-workers.

If you think your rights have been violated, contact your local CSUEU steward