

## Working in the Heat

Excessive heat is more than a comfort issue, however. Heat illnesses include heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. The last can be fatal.

Heat related illnesses can also result in distraction or lightheadedness which can lead to mistakes and injuries.

### **You can help prevent heat illness through the following measures:**

- Acclimatize. Give your body a chance to get used to hot conditions when beginning work in hot environments or when you return from a vacation or illness, or when a heat wave hits. It takes a week or two of adjustment to be fully capable of handling heavy work in hot conditions.
- Be aware of additional risk factors for heat illness, such as poor physical condition, obesity, older age, certain medications and alcohol use.
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothes that permit air circulation, such as cotton. However, if you work around moving machinery, clothing must be fitted so it cannot become entangled.
- Save heavy jobs for the coolest part of the day.
- Take frequent rest breaks in a cooler area.
- Make use of equipment design features available to protect you from excessive heat. These can include enclosures around hot equipment, exhaust ventilation to pull steam or hot air away from your work area, air conditioning, ventilation and spot fans. Follow instructions about keeping windows and doors closed when the air conditioning is on so it will work effectively. Be aware of temperature and humidity levels monitored in your work area.
- Drink plenty of cool water – not all at once but frequently through your shift. Drinks with caffeine such as coffee or cola are not a substitute for water because they cause fluid loss. Replace salt lost through sweating, following your doctor's recommendations if you are on a low-sodium diet.

A shift in a busy department on a hot day, grounds-keeping duty, a failure in the air conditioning system, or repairs performed in a closed room containing a boiler – situations such as these can put you at risk for heat illness. Learn to prevent, recognize and deal with heat illness for yourself and your fellow workers.