

Farm Safety Tip – Avoiding Heat Stress

The effects of heat kill nearly 500 people each year in the United States. Many more die or are injured due to heart attacks, falls, and equipment accidents where heat illness was the underlying cause. More Worker's Compensation claims for heat illness come from agricultural workers than from any other occupation.

When the body becomes overheated, less blood goes to the active muscles, the brain, and other internal organs. Workers get weaker, become tired sooner, and are less alert. As strain from heat becomes more severe, there can be a rapid rise in body temperature and heart rate. Workers may not realize that this is happening because there is no pain. Mental performance goes down, leading to poor judgment.

Here are some tips on avoiding heat stress:

#1 Adjust gradually to working in the heat over a period of one to two weeks.

#2 Thirst is not a good indication of how much water you need to drink. Drink lots of water before, during, and after work. Drink at least a cup of water every half hour – more if you are sweating a lot.

#3 Avoid drinks that contain sugar, caffeine, or alcohol.

#4 Wear a wide-brimmed hat to keep your head and face cool. This will also provide added protection from damaging sun exposure. Baseball caps provide little protection except to the face. A hat should protect the neck, face and ears.

#5 Take frequent breaks in the shade or in a cool environment during the hottest times of the day.

#6 If you are applying pesticides, wear a cooling vest under your PPE and spray at night or in the early morning.

Here is a listing of heat stress-related web sites: <http://www.baesg.org/heatlist.htm>

Here is a website dedicated solely to battling heat stress in agriculture:
<http://are.berkeley.edu/heat/>

Here is a list of frequently asked questions from the CDC:
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/faq.asp>

