

Outdoor workers have protections as heat wave sweeps Washington

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TUMWATER — As temperatures rise and records look poised to fall across Washington this week, businesses in industries from agriculture to building and road construction are required to take steps to protect outdoor workers from heat and smoke hazards. Employers must monitor temperature and air quality, provide training and information, make sure workers get breaks from the heat, and take other steps.

The extra protections for outdoor workers kick in at 89 degrees Fahrenheit under emergency rules from the [Department of Labor & Industries](#) (L&I), and cover any worker in any industry who must work outside for more than 15 minutes in any 60-minute period.

“Water, shade, rest, and close observation can help save workers from the real risks of serious heat illness this week. It’s incredibly tough to be outdoors working in this heat, so we are urging caution and will be out enforcing these rules statewide,” said Craig Blackwood, assistant director, L&I’s Division of Occupational Safety and Health.

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can come on quickly, and can be serious or even fatal. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include heavy sweating; a fast, weak pulse; cold, pale, and clammy skin; headaches, dizziness, nausea or vomiting; weakness; and/or cramps. Employers must respond to these symptoms appropriately under the rules—moving workers into shade, allowing cool-down rest, providing aid and continuing to monitor symptoms.

The more serious heat stroke should be treated as a medical emergency that requires professional medical treatment, and symptoms include skin that is hot, red, and dry, with no sweat; a body temperature of 104 degrees Fahrenheit or higher; a fast, strong pulse; nausea; and/or a loss of consciousness.

Employers are required to protect their workers from this serious safety hazards. And people working outside should keep an eye on those working around them to make sure they are avoiding heat-related illness.

Outdoor heat exposure rules

The new rules require employers to ensure:

- Enough cool water is available so that each worker drinks at least a quart (about one liter) every hour.

- Enough shade is available to fully cover workers during a break; or employers can use alternatives to shade like an air-conditioned trailer.
- Workers are encouraged and allowed to take paid cool-down breaks when they start to feel overheated and paid mandatory 10-minute breaks every two hours to cool down.
- Observation of workers and communication methods in place to detect and respond to signs or symptoms of heat illness.

Be proactive by protecting workers' health and safety during the extreme heat of the summer.

Find out more at: <https://Lni.wa.gov/HeatSmart>

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