

The Safety & Health Advisor

Summer 2021



OSHA Issues Healthcare COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard

OSHA is implementing a Healthcare COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) that will take effect after being published in the Federal Register. See OSHA's News Release on June 10, 2021 - [OSHA Healthcare ETS News Release](#). It will be Subpart U as 1910.502-509. In addition, for non-healthcare employers, OSHA has updated its COVID-19 guidance. View the following links to see what OSHA has planned:

OSHA Healthcare ETS:

<https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/ets>

OSHA Healthcare ETS Workplace Determination:

<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4125.pdf>

OSHA Updated Guidance for Non-Healthcare Employers:

<https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework>

(see Summary of changes June 10, 2021 in grey box at top left hand side of page)

More details will be forthcoming. In the interim, feel free to reach out to your assigned Safety and Health Consultant with any questions.

OSHA Respiratory Protection Program

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has continued to conduct pandemic related inspections under its National Emphasis Program (NEP) for COVID-19. While the NEP is primarily directed towards healthcare and manufacturing settings, the most frequent citations, almost exclusively for the healthcare industry, have been for violations of OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard, 29 CFR 1910.134.

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These citations have resulted in significant monetary penalties with violations noted for the lack of a written employer Respiratory Protection Program (RPP) or deficiencies in the program with regard to medical evaluation, fit testing and/or training of employees.

Due to COVID-19, many healthcare employers (including long-term care and assisted living facilities, clinics, dental offices and hospitals) may be requiring their employees to wear N95 (or higher-level protection) respirators for the first time or have expanded the required use of respirators to non-traditional positions due to the potential for COVID-19 exposure. Healthcare providers/staff who are in **close contact** with a patient or resident with suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection **must use** a NIOSH-approved N95 face filtering respirator or equivalent or higher-level respirator per the OSHA standard.

OSHA has provided some guidance materials (links provided) to assist employers such as "Lessons Learned: Frequently Cited Standards Related to COVID-19 Inspections" which provides guidance primarily addressing sample violations of 29 CFR 1910.134.

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/covid-citations-lessons.pdf> Another document is, "RESPIRATORY PROTECTION GUIDANCE for the Employers of Those Working in Nursing Homes, Assisted Living, and Other Long-Term Care Facilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic" that states, "*Whenever respirators are required, employers must implement a written, worksite-specific respiratory protection program (RPP), including medical evaluation, fit testing, training and other elements, as specified in OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard (29 CFR 1910.134).*"

<https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/respiratory-protection-covid19-long-term-care.pdf>

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Workplace Heat Stress

With summer approaching, we all need to be prepared to beat the heat! For many, heat can be much more than just uncomfortable. By understanding the effects of heat, you can reduce the frequency and severity of heat-related illnesses in your workplace. Certain populations including those that work outdoors, in hot internal environments, the elderly, or those with heart-related health conditions can be more susceptible to heat-related illness.

2020 tied the planet's warmest year ever, joining 18 other record highs set since the turn of the millennium. By 2050, the number of dangerous heat days (a heat index of above 104) across the U.S. is projected to more than double from 20 to 58.

Heat stress can be defined as the body's inability to cool itself and maintain a healthy temperature (below 99.7° F) in a hot environment. Illnesses that can result from heat stress include:

Heat Rash: Skin irritation caused by sweat ducts trapping perspiration under the skin.

Heat Cramps: Painful cramps from the lack of salt and fluid replacement during intense activities.

Heat Syncope: Fainting due to physical exertion in the heat leading to reduced blood flow to the brain.

Heat Exhaustion: Decreased perspiration after excessive sweating, with core body temperature rising to 104°F, which can lead to heat stroke if left untreated.

Heat Stroke: The most serious form of heat illness where the core body temperature exceeds 104°F and can cause brain or other organ damage and sometimes fatalities.

Heat Index	Risk Level	Protective Measures
Less than 91°F	Lower (Caution)	Basic heat safety and planning
91°F to 103°F	Moderate	Implement precautions and heighten awareness
103°F to 115°F	High	Additional precautions to protect workers
Greater than 115°F	Very High to Extreme	Triggers even more aggressive protective measures

Both outdoor work environments (e.g. *construction, roofing, and landscaping*) and indoor work environments pose heat stress risk (e.g. *bakeries, laundries and foundries*). Besides heat stress, the likelihood of developing skin cancer is 3.5 times higher for those who work outdoors than those who do not. The indoor risk can be exacerbated by the requirement employees wear heavy-duty PPE such as welding helmets, coveralls or hazmat suits.

Employee vulnerability to heat stress should be evaluated, starting with a risk assessment identifying employees' individual risk factors associated with heat. These can include: obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, certain medications and some blood pressure medicines, alcohol use, and use of illicit drugs such as opioids. Once identified, leadership should implement preventive measures including:

Eliminating/Controlling the heat source: Incorporate workplace design measures to control manual materials handling related overexertion (and related heat stress) by adding machines (hoists, lift tables) to reduce the physical demands of the work, insulating or adding reflective barriers around heat producing machinery, or remove sources of heat with exhaust fans. If there's no way to eliminate or reduce the heat, incorporate more frequent rest/fluid breaks and other administrative controls.

Cooling technologies can also be explored.

- *Evaporative* solutions activate with water, working similarly to how sweat cools the body down by drawing heat away (best for outdoor work).
- *Phase change* cooling technology pulls heat from the body via cooling charge packs (e.g. vests) filled with non-toxic phase change liquids (best for indoor work).
- *Absorptive* products like cooling towels, headbands and multi-bands stop sweat to keep workers cool and dry (indoor or outdoor work).

Shade and Shelters: Pop-up shelters and umbrellas provide instant outdoor relief. When it's not possible to shade the designated working area, workers should use sun protection hats, UV-rated clothing (light-

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colored, lightweight, and breathable) and sunglasses for more complete all-day coverage.

Sunscreen: Regular application of sunscreen on the jobsite is usually the easiest and most cost-effective way to reduce the risk of skin cancer.

Workplace Adaption: Acclimatizing in advance of hot working conditions can greatly minimize the effects of heat. Gradual exposure to the warmer environment over a 7–14 day period can increase tolerance and lessen heat stress effects. New workers may require additional adaption time.

Training/Policies: Provide employee training on the signs and symptoms of heat stress and how to react if/when it occurs in themselves or others. A written heat stress policy that outlines responsibilities should also be implemented and posted.

If exposures cannot be eliminated because heat is simply part of the work environment, employ some practical measures, including:

Hydrate: Regardless of how hot it is, encourage employees to hydrate early and throughout the day. Water and electrolytes are the key to balancing our thermoregulatory systems. Remind employees not to wait until they feel thirsty, as it may be too late!

Nutrition: While in hot and humid environments, it's important to eat foods that will help hydrate the body but are lower in calories like tomatoes, cucumbers, pineapples and mangos. Higher calorie foods and caffeinated beverages are hard to digest, creating metabolic heat.

Rest: Quality, uninterrupted sleep in a cool environment is beneficial for proper recovery from heat stress.

Work Pace: Harder and faster work paces create metabolic heat that needs to be managed. Where possible, allow workers to lessen the pace of work.

OSHA's annual heat illness campaign message is **Water. Rest. Shade** (see <https://www.osha.gov/heat> and <https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure>). The *OSHA-NIOSH Heat Safety Tool* can be used to calculate a heat index based on temperature and humidity and provides recommended precautions. It can be downloaded to an iPhone at <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/osha-niosh-heat-safety-tool/id1239425102>. NIOSH's **Heat Stress** webpage can be viewed at <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/>.

A proactive approach to addressing potential heat stress risks is critical to keeping employees healthy and safe this summer.



Operation Safe Driver Week Reminder – July 11-17th

With the easing of pandemic restrictions this summer, more drivers will be taking to the road for business and vacation travel. During the CVSA's (Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance) Operation Safe Driver Week, slated for July 11-17, Law enforcement officers across the US will be targeting speeding and other unsafe driving behaviors to better ensure the safety of all drivers. According to the National Safety Council, state and local police will be on the lookout for passenger and commercial motor vehicle drivers following too closely, driving distracted, making improper lane changes, failing to use a seat belt and driving while impaired.

The rate of motor vehicle-related deaths jumped 20% in the first half of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019 – despite a 17% drop in the number of miles driven – according to preliminary estimates released Sept. 15, 2020 by the National Safety Council. During last year's Operation Safe Driver Week, citations and warnings related to speeding were most common among both groups of drivers: CMV drivers were given 2,339 citations and 3,423 warnings, while passenger vehicle drivers received 14,378 citations and 11,456 warnings.

"Data shows that traffic stops and interactions with law enforcement help reduce problematic driving behaviors," CVSA President John Samis said in a press release. "By making contact with drivers during Operation Safe Driver Week, law enforcement personnel aim to make our roadways safer by targeting high-risk driving behaviors."

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“Although CVSA is a commercial motor vehicle safety organization, it was important that passenger vehicle drivers were also involved in this annual weeklong driver safety enforcement initiative,” CVSA President John Samis said in the release. “When commercial motor vehicles and passenger vehicles collide, no matter who was at fault, the results can be catastrophic, especially for the smaller and lighter passenger vehicle. Preventing crashes from happening requires every driver – commercial and personal – to be aware of how to safely share the road with other types of vehicles.”



Here are some tips from OSHA on how to avoid aggressive driving this summer.

- Keep your cool in traffic!
- Be patient and courteous to other drivers.
- Do not take other drivers' actions personally.
- Reduce your stress by planning your route ahead of time (bring the maps and directions), allowing plenty of travel time, and avoiding crowded roadways and busy driving times

OSHA 2021 Safe + Sound Week

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the rate of worker fatalities and reported injuries in the United States decreased by more than 60 percent over the past four decades since the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act was passed. However, every year, more than 5,000 workers are killed on the job and more than 3.6 million suffer a serious job-related injury or illness. These incidents don't just impact workers and their families, but can hurt businesses in a variety of ways.

OSHA believes that implementing a formal safety and health program not only helps improve businesses' safety and health performance, but potentially save money and improve competitiveness.

OSHA's **Safe + Sound** campaign encourages employers to develop and implement a safety and health program in their workplaces. Safe + Sound Week is an annual event designed to help bring focus to this campaign, celebrate successes of safety and health programs and provide information and ideas for workplace safety. This year it will be held from **August 9-15**. Free campaign resources include materials about management leadership, worker participation and finding and fixing hazards and may be found at: <https://www.osha.gov/safeandsoundweek>



OSHA states that successful safety and health programs can proactively identify and manage workplace hazards before they cause injury or illness, improving sustainability and the bottom line. Participating in Safe + Sound Week can help get your program started, energize an existing one, or provide a chance to recognize your safety successes. Over 3,400 employers participated in the event during 2020.

If you need assistance in evaluating your ergonomics or safety and health program, please contact Neal Freedman, John Cotnam, or Mark Hickox from Atlantic Charter's Safety and Health Department at (617) 488-6500.