Heat Stroke

In the current weather conditions and during the summer months ahead, University staff and contractors are strongly urged to adopt measures to eliminate or mitigate the risk of heat stroke. This is particularly important on construction sites, but others who are required to spend long periods of time in hot or humid environments for work purposes may also be at risk. Heat stroke can occur if a person works in a hot or humid environment for a prolonged period of time. Sweating may not achieve sufficient heat dissipation with the consequence that the body fails to regulate its temperature.

The early symptoms of heat stroke include feeling thirsty, fatigue, nausea and headache. Later, the sufferer may experience shortness of breath, rapid and weak pulse, paleness and clammy skin, dizziness, confusion or even loss of consciousness and convulsions. Construction workers and cleansing workers are especially prone to heat stroke when working for long hours in such an environment, especially if appropriate preventive measures have not been taken.

If there is a risk of heat stroke to their staff, departments should arrange for a competent person to conduct a suitable assessment of the risk of heat stress in the work environment and take appropriate preventive measures. The Labour Department has produced leaflets entitled "Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work in a Hot Environment", “Check list for Heat Stress Assessment at Construction Sites” and "Checklist for Heat Stress Assessment at Outdoor Cleansing Workplaces". There is also a booklet entitled “Risk Assessment for the Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work”. These can be used to assess the risk of heat stress in the workplace.

Practical measures to reduce heat stress may include, but not be limited to,

Supply of cool potable water at readily accessible points;
Suitable clothing, such as wide-brimmed hats and clothing that is thin and air permeable.
Erection of sunshades at appropriate locations;
Provision of ventilation (eg. blowers), shower facilities and/or cooling devices (e.g. cooling fans with atomized water spray);
Arrangements for regular rest breaks or job rotation to reduce workers’ exposure to the hot environment.

If you have concerns about the possibility of heat stroke during University activities, or require advice on conducting a risk assessment to reduce heat stress, please contact the Safety Office on 2859 2400.

Paul Hunt PhD.
Assistant Director of Safety