



Safety Scene

Understanding Heat Stress

A few reminders to help keep workers safe during the dog days of summer.

Hot, sticky summer days and strenuous activities can be a dangerous combination for your employees, whether they're working outside or inside. Without the appropriate preventative measures, this risky mixture can quickly lead to heat stress or one of several serious heat disorders including heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

The body can gather heat in two ways: heat is either generated through activity or absorbed from a source in the environment, such as the sun. Under normal conditions, excess body heat is naturally shed through the sweating/evaporation process and by increasing blood flow to the skin. However, many factors can cause this internal temperature regulation system to fail. This condition is called heat stress. If allowed to progress, a person suffering from heat stress can rapidly deteriorate to heat exhaustion, or worse, heat stroke.

Thankfully, a worker experiencing a heat-related illness usually responds quickly to treatment, so learning to recognize the onset of heat stress is important. The early symptoms can include headache, fatigue, lethargy, poor judgment, irritability and lack of coordination. As heat stress progresses to heat exhaustion or, heat stroke, the symptoms get more serious, such as dizziness or lightheadedness, vomiting, fainting or passing out and pale, clammy skin. (See **Support Docs** at www.sbcmag.info for a complete list of heat-related illnesses and their accompanying symptoms.)

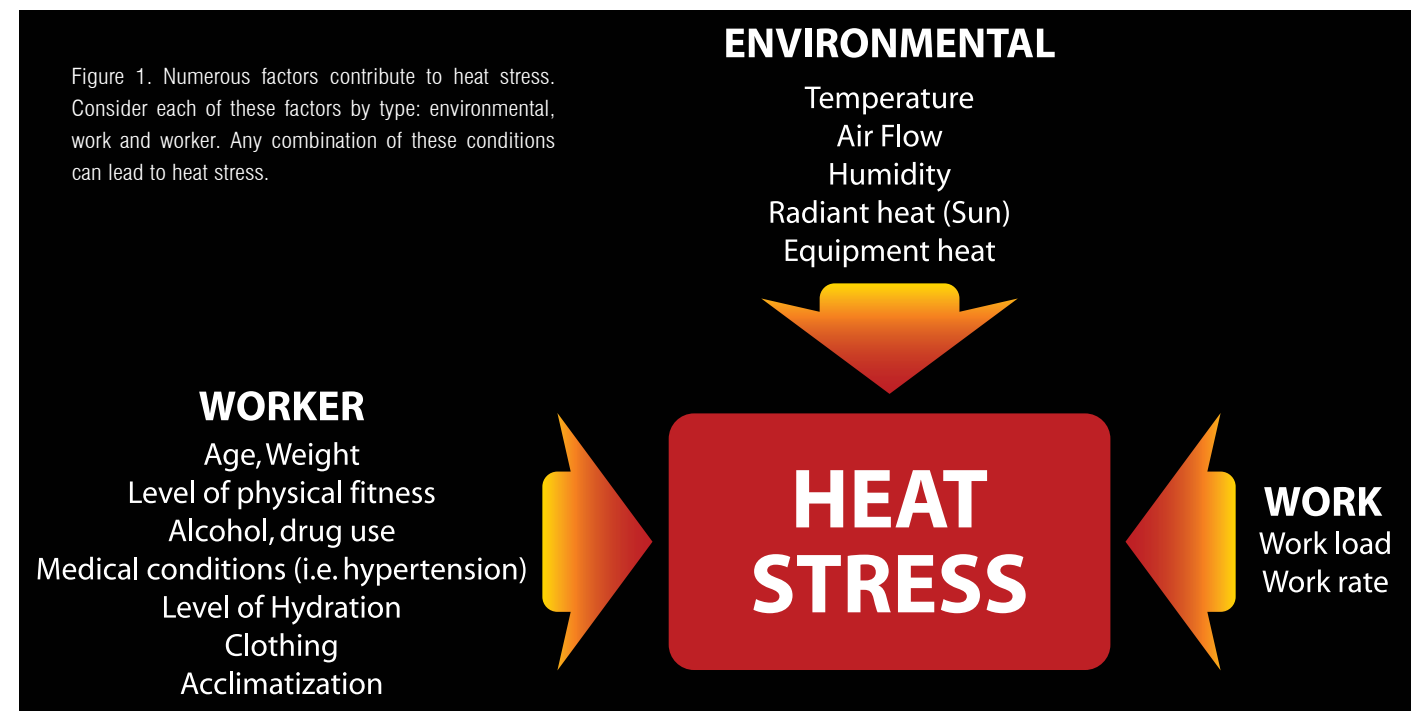
If any of these signs or symptoms is present, it's important to take action immediately. Begin by moving the victim to a cool or shady environment. Using a cool, wet towel or sponge, slowly wet his/her skin to help with the cooling process. If the victim is not vomiting, give him/her clear, non-carbonated liquids to help replace the lost fluids. If the heat illness has progressed to heat stroke, proceed as above and call for emergency medical help immediately.

Numerous factors contribute to heat stress. Figure 1 reveals each of these factors by type: environmental, work and worker. Any combination of these conditions can lead to heat stress.

The best way to control heat stress is through prevention. In many regions, working when it's hot and humid outside is inevitable, but there are plenty of steps you and your employees can take to keep heat stress at bay.

- Update, revise and change worker procedures to put as little stress on the body as possible.
- Use air conditioning or increase ventilation.
- Add fans in strategic places for spot cooling.
- Schedule work-rest cycles to keep employees rotating in and out of strenuous jobs.
- Schedule the hardest projects and task for the coolest parts of the day.
- Mandate working in pairs at a minimum.
- Encourage your employees to wear cool, light-colored clothing. (Cotton, for example)

by Molly E. Butz



- Provide plenty of cool water and encourage your employees to take frequent, brief water breaks.

Even at its mildest, heat stress can result in workplace accidents. Early recognition and treatment is critical for your employees' safety and health, as heat stress and its related

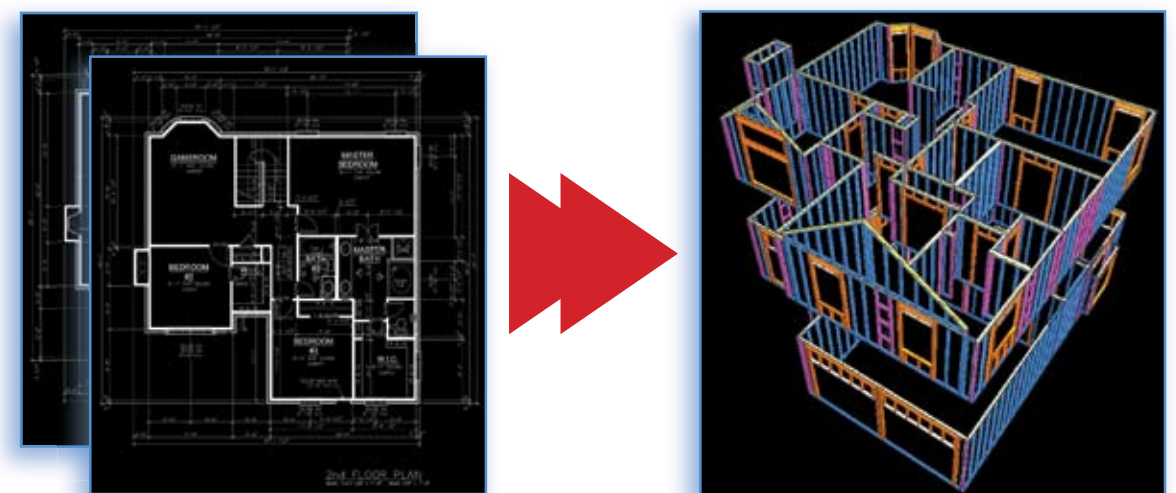
symptoms can swiftly become very serious, or even fatal. Simple prevention methods and work practices can lessen or even eliminate your risk and increase overall productivity. Safety first! **SBC**

To pose a question for Safety Scene, contact Molly at mbutz@qaltim.com.

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6300 Enterprise Lane • Suite 200 • Madison, WI 53719
608/310-6706 phone • 608/271-7006 fax
www.sbcmag.info • admgr@sbcmag.info