



# Ironworkers...*On the Safe Side*

**Safety and Health Bulletin Dedicated to Servicing Our District Councils, Local Unions and IMPACT Contractors Throughout North America**

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## The Heat's on – Avoiding Heat Stress and Illness

“Heat Illness” is one of the “**Deadly Dozen Hazards**” that our members face in the workplace and is part of the International Association’s “**2017 ZERO Incident**” campaign. Machinery, engines and tools can easily overheat and we need to be aware that humans can overheat too. Each year, members experience the symptoms of heat stress in the workplace on different levels and for a variety of reasons. The fact is that heat illness can be deadly and can affect members at any age. Thousands of workers in the construction industry become sick from exposure to heat, and some even die. We need to know that heat illnesses and deaths are preventable.



### Who is affected by heat illness?

Any worker exposed to hot and humid conditions is at risk of heat illness, especially those doing heavy work that many ironworking perform daily. Some workers might be at greater risk than others if they have not built up a tolerance to hot conditions, including new workers, temporary workers, or those returning to work after a week or more off. Others factors such as alcohol consumption the night before can be a contributing factor to dehydration that could result in heat stress or illness. In addition to these situations, Ironworkers can also face many heat waves throughout the year that creates more exposure to conditions resulting in higher cases of heat related illnesses.

### What is heat illness and how does it happen?

The body normally cools itself naturally by sweating. During hot weather, especially with high humidity, sweating isn't enough. Body temperature can rise quickly to dangerous levels if precautions are not taken such as drinking water frequently and having access to shade or air conditioning. Heat illnesses range from heat rash and heat cramps to heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Muscle cramping might be the first sign of heat-related illness, and may lead to heat exhaustion or stroke.

Heat stroke requires immediate medical attention and can result in death. Following are some of the common signs and symptoms of heat stress that must be recognized.

- Heavy sweating
- Weakness
- Cold, pale, and clammy skin
- Fast, weak pulse
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

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The activity of decking installation can be much hotter due to the reflection of sun and heat from the metal decking. This is only one of many common work activities that Ironworkers perform that can produce much higher temperatures in full sun conditions that must be recognized. The carrying and installation of rebar on decks and walls in hot and humid conditions is another common activity that can lead to heat stress and illness. Following are common symptoms of heat stroke that can result in death.

- High body temperature (above 103°F)
- Hot, red, dry or moist skin
- Rapid and strong pulse
- Possible unconsciousness

## How can heat illness be prevented?

Employers should establish a complete heat illness prevention program to prevent heat illness. This includes: provide workers with water, shade; gradually increase workloads and allow more frequent breaks for new workers or workers who have been away for a week or more to build a tolerance for working in the heat (**acclimatization**); modify work schedules as necessary; plan for emergencies and train workers about the symptoms of heat-related illnesses and their prevention; and monitor workers for signs of illness. Workers new to the heat or those that have been away from work and are returning can be most vulnerable to heat stress and they must be acclimatized. Following are some ways to help prevent heat related illness and fatalities.

- Drink water every 15 minutes, even if you are not thirsty
- Move to a cooler location, rest in the shade
- Apply cool, wet cloths on as much of your body as possible
- Lie down and loosen your clothing
- Wear a hat and light-colored clothing
- Learn the signs of heat illness and what to do in an emergency
- Keep an eye on fellow Ironworkers
- "Easy does it" on your first days of work in the heat. You need to get used to it

## What you should do if you see a member with heat illness symptoms!

- Call 911 immediately — this is a medical emergency
- Move the person to a cooler environment
- Reduce the person's body temperature with cool cloths or even pouring water on them
- Do NOT give fluids

We want to make every effort to protect our members from heat illness, one of the **“Deadly Dozen Hazards”** that our members face in the workplace and is part of the International Association’s **“2017 ZERO Incident”** campaign. Please contact me in the Safety and Health Department at (800)368-0105, Jeff Norris, Canadian Safety Coordinator at (780) 459-4498, or Vicki O’Leary, District Representative of Safety/Diversity at (202) 702-7828 if you have any questions pertaining to workplace safety and health issues.

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