

**Program Management Office  
Safety Bulletin for April 2019**

## Heat Stress: Personal Lessons From a Loss Prevention Engineer

### How I could have avoided heat illness

*by James Kilpatrick, Loss Prevention Engineer, State Compensation Insurance Fund*

If you think you're immune to heat illness, you might want to give that a little more thought. I, as a Loss Prevention Engineer, felt that way and paid the price one Saturday afternoon a few years ago.

I had asked a carpenter friend of mine to help me build a patio deck in my back yard. It was the middle of August. With highs of 95 degrees expected that day, we got an early start—around 7:30 in the morning. But, everything came to a screeching halt about five hours later. **I was losing my balance, felt weak, and a bit dizzy, and my hands and feet were tingling.** I knew something wasn't right, so I went to my garage and sat down on a bench.

My friend recognized right away **that I was suffering from heat stress.** He immediately got a fan, turned it on, and told me to stay seated. He also got a towel soaked with cool water and placed it over my neck. Then he told me I was done for the day.

I made three key mistakes that day. My hope is that by telling this story, others won't make those same mistakes.

### **Tried to stay cool by wearing less**

Because it was so hot, I wore a tank top, shorts, and a baseball cap—a perfect combination for the conditions, or so I thought. In the meantime, there's my friend, the experienced carpenter—He was wearing a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and a wide-brimmed hat.

Little did I realize when I suited-up in summer attire that day that being covered up like my friend was actually better because the moisture being transferred from his body to his clothes was helping keep him cool.

### **Tried to keep up with someone who's used to working in the heat**

My next mistake was trying to keep pace with my friend. I was eager to get this project done and he only had a couple of days that he was available to help. Time was of the essence, so I tried to give it the same effort he did.

If your workers aren't used to the warm or hot conditions, Cal/OSHA requires that you give them enough time to acclimate. We frequently remind our policyholders of this. I needed

time to adjust to the heat that day, but instead dove right into my project without trying to acclimate at all.

### **Didn't drink enough water**

This is one of the most important lessons of all. On a worksite Cal/OSHA requires employers provide at least one quart of cool drinking water per employee for each hour of work; and recommends that each worker drink at least that amount during warm or hot weather. As a Loss Prevention Engineer, I take it a step further and urge employers **to ensure** their employees are actually drinking the recommended amount. And yet, there I was with access to water, my friend drinking it, and me too focused on getting the work done to stop and drink.

To sum it up, I was unable to continue the project that day because I didn't follow my own advice.

This was definitely a learning experience and a reminder that heat stress and heat stroke can indeed happen to all of us, even in our own backyard.  
For more details, please see Cal/OSHA's [Heat Illness Prevention Regulations](#).