



TEAMSTERS SAFETY & HEALTH FACTS

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Employers Should Institute Plans During Hot Days to Protect Workers from Heat Illness and Death

An unprecedented heat wave has gripped Western United States, reaching temperatures as high as 117 degrees, placing millions of workers and citizens at grave danger from heat illness and causing or contributing to dozens of deaths. The historically high temperatures have led to extreme drought and a surge in wildfires in California, Arizona, and Oregon, among other states.

According to [OSHA law](#), employers are required to provide a safe and healthy workplace.

An employer with workers exposed to high temperatures should establish a comprehensive **heat illness prevention program** including the following elements:

- Develop and implement [written procedures](#) for heat illness prevention;
- Provide air conditioning, with cooled air or fans, if possible
- Make changes to workload and schedules so heavy work is done during the coolest part of the day and workers can take frequent breaks to rest and drink water;
- Provide access to fresh water and shade and encourage workers to use them for prevention;
- Monitor workers for signs of illness;
- Train all workers and supervisors about heat illness prevention, symptoms and first aid;
- Allow new or returning workers to gradually increase workloads and take more frequent breaks as they acclimatize or build a tolerance for working in the heat; and
- Plan for emergencies.

With regard to heat stress prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic, both OSHA and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) issued special recommendations on the issue. Please refer to [OSHA Guidance on the Use of Cloth Face Coverings while Working Outdoors in Hot and Humid Condition and specific information for employers](#) and [workers](#).

[OSHA's Occupational Exposure to Heat page](#) explains what employers can do to protect workers from extreme heat. The website also includes resources for specific industries and heat illness [educational and training materials](#). Several OSHA State Plans - which cover both private and public sector workers - including [CA](#), [OR](#) and [WA](#), have or are developing standards for heat illness prevention in outdoor workplaces.

Teamster local Union representatives may consider sharing the IBT fact sheet, [Protecting Workers in Hot Environments](#) and the mentioned [OSHA](#) and [NIOSH](#) guidance on heat stress during the pandemic with their members.

We urge Teamster members to become aware of tasks and working conditions that may put their lives at risk for heat illness or death and work with their Local Unions to ensure that employers take the necessary steps to protect worker health and safety.
