



Heat Stress



Now that we are into the hot summer season, it is a good time to remind ourselves of the effects of Heat Stress while working in hot environment. A good starting point for employers would be to quickly review the legal requirements placed upon them.

Employers have a duty under clause 25(2)(h) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act “to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker.” This includes developing policies and procedures to protect workers in environments that are hot because of hot processes and/or **weather**.

On a compliance basis, the Ministry of Labour recommends the Threshold Limit Values (TLVs) for Heat Stress and Heat Strain published by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH). These values are based on preventing workers’ core body temperatures from rising above 38° Celsius and is intended to assist workplace parties to understand heat stress, and develop and implement workplace policies to prevent heat-stress-related illness.

Heat Stress occurs when heat is combined with other stresses such as hard physical work, loss of fluids, fatigue or some pre-existing medical conditions, it may lead to heat-related illness, disability and even death. It can happen to anybody – even the young and fit.

Heat exposure may occur in many workplaces. Significant sources of heat can be found in workplaces such as foundries, smelters, chemical plants, bakeries and commercial kitchens. For outdoor workers, direct sunlight is usually the main source of heat. Humidity in workplaces also contributes to heat stress.

To cope with heat, the body passes it into the environment. The harder the body works, the more heat it has to lose. When the environment is hot and/or humid or has a source of radiant heat (such as a furnace or the sun), your body must work harder to get rid of heat. If the air is moving (for example, by fans) and it is cooler than your body, it is easier for your body to pass heat into the environment. Workers on medication or with pre-existing medical conditions may be more susceptible to heat stress because some medication and/or medical conditions may impair the body’s response to heat. Such workers should speak to their personal physicians to see if their medication(s) and/or health condition(s) affect their ability to work in hot environments.

The best way to deal with Heat Stress is to spot the symptoms such as a heat rash, heat cramps, fainting, exhaustion and heat stroke. A complete description of the causes, symptoms, treatment and prevention is available on the Ministry of Labour Web site at www.labour.gov.on.ca.

Mathews Minute



For this month we are going to discuss two of the more high profile implications of the results of our recent Ontario election. As you are surely aware, after having a budget designed to woo the NDP into supporting their government and was rejected, the Province of Ontario gave the incumbent Liberals a majority government. While she has a majority government that could pass any budget it felt was appropriate, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced she would pass that budget.

Quite possibly the highest profile aspect of that budget was its positions on pension plans and, specifically, the introduction of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan ("ORPP"). While all the details are not yet available the outline of the plan includes:

- employers and employees are required to equally contribute an additional 1.9% each (3.8% combined) of annual earnings up to \$90 000. This will be an increased cost for employers and a reduction in take home pay for employees.
- it is expected to be introduced in 2017 with contribution rates phased in over two years and enrollment beginning with the largest employers.
- employers who offer "a comparable pension plan" may be exempt from the ORPP.

One point to note is that a "comparable pension plan" is not defined. It is likely safe to assume your unionized staff, with the large multi-employer plans, will be exempted but we are bringing this to your attention because the cost implications for the staff you employ that are non-union. Do RRSP contribution plans count? Is this intended to take their place? None of this is clear at this time.

In addition, a separate but related issue is the ongoing concerns about the Ontario College of Trades and its implications for the construction industry. At this time, there is a freeze on new applications for compulsory registration in the College until such time as a review commission has been completed. As no appointments have yet been made to that commission, and won't be at least until the new government is sworn in, it would appear that this freeze will remain in place for some time yet.

Both the ORPP and the continued activities of the College of Trades represent potential increase to the costs of doing business for employers in Ontario, and are important issues for employers to be aware of looking forward.

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