



# Warm weather working

The Diggers' Forum committee have put together a few handy hints and tips to help get through the summer as we all optimistically look forward to warmer days and heady temperatures of above 17 degrees Celsius.

Your employer should have a **risk assessment** for working in warm weather. Familiarise yourself with it and make sure it is being adhered to on site. The possibility of a **dynamic** risk assessment should also be considered during hot weather working. Have you been provided with sun cream? Is your PPE right for the conditions or are you still in insulated waterproofs? If not, talk to your site management team as they may not be aware of the situation.

As outdoor workers we are exposed to high temperatures for long periods and are at a higher-than-average risk of overexposure to UV radiation. Along with those ridiculous tan lines, this can lead to **heat stroke**, **heat exhaustion**, and of course, **skin damage** which in turn can lead to an increased risk of **skin cancer**.

To protect against these risks:

try to reschedule work activities for **cooler times of the day**, such as earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon when levels of UVR are less intense. It is understandable that some activities may not be adjusted such as machine watching or surveying, but clear communication and planning may aid this. Mattocking for example might be best done early in the morning when the ground is more likely to be damp.

**try to stay out of the sun** during the hottest part of the day. Work hours to avoid peak sun exposure are 11am–3pm between March and October in the UK. We know that this is almost impossible in the field, so try to rotate between indoor/shaded and outdoor tasks to minimise exposure. Maybe save up less strenuous tasks like paperwork/section drawing for the hottest part of the day and do them in the shade if possible.

**wear sunscreen** especially if it's windy. Ideally this should be of a high factor (30 plus) and re-applied regularly every 2 hours. Your employer should provide a generic brand of sunscreen, but as an ever-present risk it's also best to have your own. The sunscreen you use must not be expired, or has been open for longer than 12 months. Remember to use on your neck, ears, and other areas you may forget.

*There should be a section in your risk assessment about working in warm weather.*

*Wear sunscreen, especially if it's windy. Ideally this should be of a high factor and re-applied regularly. It should be available for all.*



*Drink plenty of cool water and keep hydrated. Your company should make sure that you are provided with sufficient drinking water.*

**cover up** using lightweight material where you can. The best way to avoid being burned by the sun is to keep it away from your skin. Long sleeves made of lighter materials are recommended. Hats (where possible) are absolutely essential, especially wide-brimmed ones or hats which have neck protection. If you have sunglasses (recommended with the CE Mark and British Standard Mark 12312-1:2013 E) available to use where possible, please use them to protect your eyes.

**stay hydrated** by drinking plenty of cool water, ideally one cup every 15–20 minutes. You should be provided with sufficient drinking water AND drinking vessels, but it may be best for your health and that of the planet to bring your own reusable water bottle. Drink small amounts of water regularly – if you feel thirsty, you're already dehydrated. It can be helpful to add **electrolyte** sachets into water or other additions like cordial/squash. It is vital to keep an intake of sugar and salt during warm weather work.

Heat stroke is more likely when heavy physical work is being done, so pace yourself and vary your work.

*Report any symptoms of heat stroke, exhaustion or burning to your supervisor or on-site first aider.*

**Heat exhaustion** is caused by the loss of salt and water from the body by excessive sweating. Left untreated it can lead to heat stroke, so it is important to take care of yourself. Signs to look out for are

- headache, dizziness, and confusion
- loss of appetite and nausea
- sweating, with pale, clammy skin
- cramps in the arms, legs, or abdomen

**Heat stroke** is the most severe form of heat-related conditions and is caused by the failure of the body to regulate temperature, resulting in the body becoming dangerously overheated. Symptoms include:

- headache, dizziness, and discomfort
- restlessness and confusion
- hot, flushed, and dry skin
- body temperature of above 40°C
- fainting or seizures

Take **extra rest breaks**, whenever you feel you need one and make sure there is shade in rest areas. You need to remove yourself from direct sunlight. **Remove PPE when resting** to help encourage heat loss. Clothing (including PPE) should ideally not be tight or restricting, it should allow body heat to escape.



**If you feel unwell, don't hesitate at all - report any symptoms of heat stroke/exhaustion/burning to your supervisor or on-site contact. If you are concerned about behaviour or expectations whilst working in warm weather, we strongly recommend you seek guidance with the health and safety reps of your employer and potentially your union.**

After you have finished work and are off site, continue to look after and monitor yourself. It is just as important to look after your health away from work as it is at work.

Some things to consider:

- Do you feel sick or have any symptoms of heat stroke?
- Are you sunburnt? If you are sunburnt, do you have the necessary things to aid this like after-sun lotion? Furthermore, if you have sunburn, take care of covering the areas of the body affected with appropriate clothing on the following day at work.
- Do you feel hot still even after being in the shade?
- Have you noticed any new moles or freckles? Checking every few weeks is important during outdoor work. If you do notice something as described in changing shape, size or colour, itching or bleeding, arrange to see a medical professional as soon as you can. Notify them of your job role and your current working conditions outside.
- Are you safe to drive yourself or other members of a team? This question can be especially difficult if you are the sole driver within a team. If there are concerns, raise them. Adjustments can and should be made as soon as possible.
- What are your plans after work? Taking part in strenuous activities or sports might not be ideal after long exposure to warm weather. It is just something to bear in mind, drinking too much alcohol or caffeine during or after warm weather might have a negative effect on your body.
- Do you have the right food to consume after work? It is recommended to have more hydrating foods after exposure to heat, like fruit. Remember that eating food leads to an increase in temperature as the process of digestion is heat-generating. So hot or 'heavy' foodstuffs might actually make you feel sick. Often you may not feel like eating much in summer. This is normal but you do need to keep your energy levels up.

Useful links:

- [www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/outdoor-working.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/outdoor-working.htm)
- [www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/index.htm)
- [www.sunsafeworkplaces.co.uk](http://www.sunsafeworkplaces.co.uk)
- heat exhaustion on the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heat-exhaustion-heatstroke/>
- NHS "how to cope with hot weather" : <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/seasonal-health/heatwave-how-to-cope-in-hot-weather/>
- The Royal College of Nursing "working in hot weather" <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/RCN-advice/working-in-hot-weather>
- Health and safety executive website "temperature in the workplace" <https://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/index.htm>
- Food and drinks recommended for after exposure to hot weather [How to eat in a heatwave | Good Food](#)