

Warm Weather Working

In the time of Covid-19

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Whilst we are all living in strange and uncertain times, having just come out of the sunniest spring on record and with Summer 2020 set to be a scorcher, we can be certain of one thing: the sun will shine, at least for a bit.

It is perhaps then, time to remind everyone about the precautions you and your employer should be taking when working in warm weather whilst adhering to social distancing rules in the workplace.

A lot has changed but some things haven’t, there should be still a section in your risk assessment about working in warm weather. Familiarise yourself with it and make sure it is being adhered to on site. If you see that something is not being adhered to or something that should be provided isn’t (like sun cream) or if you think changes need to be made (e.g. suitable PPE needs to be provided instead of insulated waterproofs) talk to your site management team as they may not be aware of the situation.

As outdoor workers Diggers are still exposed to high temperatures for long periods, and are at a higher than average risk of overexposure to UV radiation. 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 tasks for cooler times of the day, such as earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon when levels of UVR are less intense. Mattocking through that concrete like layer might be best done early in the morning when the ground is more likely to be damp (especially if you have soaked it the day before and covered it over night with a tarp or Terram!).

Try to stay out of the sun during the hottest part of the day. We know that this is almost impossible when in the field, so try to rotate between indoor/shaded and outdoor tasks to minimise exposure. Perhaps save up less strenuous tasks (like paperwork/section drawings) for the hottest part of the day and do them in the shade if possible. Remember to adhere to social distancing rules and not to crowd into shaded areas. Take turns or set up multiple shaded areas.

Wear sunscreen, especially if its windy. Ideally this should be of a high factor and re-applied regularly. Your employer should provide a generic brand of sunscreen and some do, but with covid-19 an ever-present risk you should have your own bottle and keep it with you. Avoid sharing sunscreen.

If you have specific requirements due to skin allergies etc. then you should talk to your employer about buying your own and filling out an expenses form.



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 might seem like a hassle but no one wants to end up looking like an old leather sofa.

Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of cool water. You should be provided with sufficient drinking water AND drinking vessels (paper cups not drinking horns!) 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. You should wipe down taps and any other surfaces you have touched with appropriate cleaning products after you have filled your vessel.

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

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 and others around you (from a distance!). 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

Take extra rest breaks, whenever you feel you need one (but don't take the piss), and make sure there is shade in rest areas, remove PPE when resting to help encourage heat loss, and clothing (including PPE) should ideally not be tight or restricting, it should allow body heat to escape.

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

Useful links:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/managers.htm>

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/outdoor.htm>

www.sunsafeworkplaces.co.uk

