Heat Stress – Landscaping Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Landscaping work often involves long hours outdoors, frequently in hot and humid conditions, making workers vulnerable to heat stress. Heat stress can lead to serious health problems, including heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat stroke, which can be fatal if not properly managed.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Specific Risks

1. **Heat Exhaustion**
   - **Symptoms:** Heat exhaustion is characterized by heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness, nausea, headache, and muscle cramps. It occurs when the body loses too much water and salt.
   - **Risk Factors:** High temperatures, high humidity, direct sun exposure, and heavy physical activity increase the risk of heat exhaustion, particularly if workers are not acclimatized to the heat.
1. **Heat Cramps**
   - **Symptoms:** Heat cramps are painful muscle spasms, usually in the legs or abdomen, that occur due to excessive loss of electrolytes through sweating.
   - **Risk Factors:** Strenuous physical activity in hot conditions, increases the likelihood of heat cramps.
1. **Heat Stroke**
   - **Symptoms:** Heat stroke is a medical emergency characterized by a high body temperature (above 103°F or 39.4°C),

confusion, loss of consciousness, and hot, dry skin. Unlike heat exhaustion, the body stops sweating, making it unable to cool down.
- **Risk Factors:** Prolonged exposure to extreme heat, physical exertion without adequate hydration, and failure to recognize and treat earlier signs of heat stress can lead to heat stroke.

1. **Dehydration**

- **Symptoms:** Dehydration can occur even before heat stress symptoms appear, with signs including dry mouth, dark urine, fatigue, and dizziness.
- **Risk Factors:** Inadequate fluid intake, excessive sweating, and consumption of diuretics like caffeine or alcohol increase the risk of dehydration.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Personal Protective Measures

1. **Hydration**

- Drink Plenty of Water: Aim to drink about 1 cup (8 ounces) of water every 15-20 minutes during high heat.
- Avoid Dehydrating Beverages: Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol. Sports drinks can help replenish electrolytes lost through sweating, but water should remain your primary source of hydration.

1. **Clothing and Sun Protection**

- Wear Light, Breathable Clothing: Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, and breathable fabrics such as cotton.
- Use Sun Protection: Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses and apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 to protect your skin from sunburn, which can exacerbate heat stress.

1. **Work Scheduling and Rest**

- Acclimatization: Increase exposure to hot conditions over a week or more to allow your body to acclimate.

- Take Frequent Breaks: Take regular breaks in a cool area to allow your body to recover from the heat.

Workplace Measures

1. **Monitoring Conditions**

- Check Weather Conditions: Monitor the weather forecast, including temperature, humidity, and heat index, to plan work schedules accordingly.
- Use the Buddy System: Work in pairs or teams, so workers can monitor each other for signs of heat stress.

1. **Emergency Preparedness**

- **Recognize the Signs:** Be familiar with the symptoms of heat stress, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat stroke. If you or a coworker exhibit symptoms, take immediate action.
- **First Aid for Heat Stress**
    - **Heat Exhaustion:** Move the person to a cool, shaded area, provide water to sip, and cool the body with damp cloths. Seek medical attention if symptoms do not improve.
    - **Heat Stroke:** Call emergency services immediately. Move the person to a cool place, remove excess clothing, and cool the body with water or ice packs. Do not give fluids if the person is unconscious.
- **Plan for Emergencies:** Ensure all workers know the emergency procedures.

Training and Awareness

1. **Education on Heat Stress and Heat Awareness Campaigns**

- **Regular Training:** Provide regular training sessions on heat stress prevention, recognition of symptoms, and appropriate first aid. Use posters and signs in high-heat areas to reinforce the importance of hydration, rest breaks, and sun protection.

1. **Encourage a Safety Culture and Lead by Example**

- **Promote Open Communication:** Encourage workers to speak up if

they notice signs of heat stress in themselves. Supervisors should model heat stress prevention behaviors, such as taking regular breaks and staying hydrated.

FINAL WORD

Heat stress is a serious concern in landscaping. Stay hydrated, wear appropriate clothing, take regular breaks, and recognize the signs of heat-related illnesses.