

Beat the Heat this Summer

With summer fast approaching, it's important to emphasise the risks of heat stress in the workplace. The dangers of working in the summer heat and the importance of keeping hydrated were the focus of a WorkCover NSW awareness campaign earlier in the year. With the weather warming, it's important to revisit the key facts.

The risks of heat stress can be deadly and have resulted in a number of fatalities in Australia in recent years. In the three years to July 2011, there were 497 claims for workplace fatigue and heat stroke in New South Wales alone, at a cost of \$4.3million to the NSW Workers Compensation Scheme.

John Watson, WorkCover's Work Health and Safety Division General Manager, said the campaign focused on water as the best source of hydration when working in the heat.

"February is traditionally one of the hottest months of the year and the campaign urged workers to drink plenty of water and stay hydrated when working during the hottest times of the day", Mr Watson said.

"When a worker becomes affected by fatigue and heat stress their performance and productivity becomes reduced, and the chance of a workplace injury is increased due to a reduced ability to concentrate, recognise risks and communicate effectively. While caffeinated soft drinks have become increasingly popular in recent years medical experts advise that they can act as a diuretic and lead to further dehydration, so water really is the best option when working in the heat."

WorkCover recommends employers take the following action to reduce and prevent heat stress:

- Provide and maintain equipment and shelter to protect workers from the sun
- Provide sun safety information instruction training and supervision
- Rotate tasks to lessen exposure to the sun as well as mental and physical fatigue, and schedule work at cooler times of the day if possible.
- Use rest periods in addition to scheduled meal breaks if possible.
- Provide personal protective equipment such as:
 - Clothing with UPF 50+ rating, loose shirts with long sleeves, collars and long pants.
 - Broad spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30+)
 - Sunglasses which meet Australian Standards for UV protection.
- Understand and act on symptoms of heat stress.

For more information on Heat Stress and how to protect yourself please visit www.workcover.nsw.gov.au or www.mlaholdings.com.au