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OSHA National News Release

U.S. Department of Labor

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US Department of Labor announces enhanced, expanded measures to protect workers from hazards of extreme heat, indoors and out

Part of an interagency Biden-Harris administration effort to protect workers, communities

WASHINGTON – To combat the hazards associated with extreme heat exposure – both indoors and outdoors – the White House today announced enhanced and expanded efforts the U.S. Department of Labor is taking to address heat-related illnesses.

As part of the [Biden-Harris administration's interagency effort](#) and commitment to workplace safety, climate resilience, and environmental justice, the department's [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) is initiating enhanced measures to protect workers better in hot environments and reduce the dangers of exposure to ambient heat.

While heat illness is largely preventable, and commonly under-reported, thousands of workers are sickened each year by workplace heat exposure. Despite widespread under-reporting, 43 workers died from heat illness in 2019, and at least 2,410 others suffered serious injuries and illnesses. Increasing heat precipitated by climate change can cause lost productivity and work hours resulting in large wage losses for workers. The Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center [estimates](#) the economic loss from heat to be at least \$100 billion annually – a number that could double by 2030 and quintuple by 2050 under a higher emissions scenario.

To emphasize its concern and take necessary action, OSHA is implementing an [enforcement initiative](#) on heat-related hazards, developing a [National Emphasis Program](#) on heat inspections, and launching a rulemaking process to develop a workplace heat standard. In addition, the agency is forming a [National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health Heat Injury and Illness Prevention Work Group](#) to provide better understanding of challenges and to identify and share best practices to protect workers.

"Throughout the nation, millions of workers face serious hazards from high temperatures both outdoors and indoors. Amid changing climate, the growing frequency and intensity of extreme heat events is increasing the dangers workers face, especially for workers of color who disproportionately work in essential jobs in tough conditions," said U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Marty Walsh. "As Secretary of Labor, my priority is to make sure we are taking appropriate action to keep workers healthy and safe on the job."

OSHA implemented an intervention and enforcement initiative recently to prevent and protect workers from heat-related illnesses and deaths while they are working in hazardous hot environments. The newly established initiative prioritizes heat-related interventions and inspections of work activities on days when the heat index exceeds 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

"While agricultural and construction workers often come to mind first when thinking about workers most exposed to heat hazards, without proper safety actions, sun protection and climate-control, intense heat can be harmful to a wide variety of workers indoors or outdoors and during any season," said Acting Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health Jim Frederick.

"While agricultural and construction workers often come to mind first when thinking about workers most exposed to heat hazards, without proper safety actions, sun protection and climate-control, intense heat can be harmful to a wide variety of workers indoors or outdoors and during any season," said Acting Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health Jim Frederick.

The OSHA initiative applies to indoor and outdoor worksites in general industry, construction, agriculture and maritime where potential heat-related hazards exist. On days when a recognized heat temperature can result in increased risks of [heat-related illnesses](#), OSHA will increase enforcement efforts. Employers are encouraged to implement intervention methods on heat priority days proactively, including regularly taking breaks for water, rest, shade, training workers on how to identify common symptoms and what to do when a worker suspects a heat-related illness is occurring, and taking periodic measurements to determine workers' heat exposure.

OSHA Area Directors across the nation will institute the following:

- Prioritize inspections of heat-related complaints, referrals and employer-reported illnesses and initiate an onsite investigation where possible.
- Instruct compliance safety and health officers, during their travels to job sites, to conduct an intervention (providing the agency's heat poster/wallet card, discuss the importance of easy access to cool water, cooling areas and acclimatization) or opening an inspection when they observe employees performing strenuous work in hot conditions.
- Expand the scope of other inspections to address heat-related hazards where worksite conditions or other evidence indicates these hazards may be present.

In October 2021, OSHA will take a significant step toward a federal heat standard to ensure protections in workplaces across the country by issuing an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on heat injury and illness prevention in outdoor and indoor work settings. The advance notice will initiate a comment period allowing OSHA to gather diverse perspectives and technical expertise on topics including heat stress thresholds, heat acclimatization planning, exposure monitoring, and strategies to protect workers.

The agency is also working to establish a National Emphasis Program on heat hazard cases, which will target high-risk industries and focus agency resources and staff time on heat inspections. The 2022 National Emphasis Program will build on the existing Regional Emphasis Program for Heat Illnesses in OSHA's Region VI, which covers Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

[Read the statement by President Biden on Mobilizing the Administration to Address Extreme Heat.](#)

[Learn more about OSHA.](#)

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