

safety bulletin

High Temperatures and Poor Air Quality

Many areas across Australia are facing high temperatures early in the Summer season in addition to a significant decline in air quality due to the recent and ongoing Bushfires.

The smoke is made up of small particles that are not visible to the human eye and include gases and water vapour. The gases are made up of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds (VOC's).

Whether you are working or holidaying over the summer period, prolonged exposure to high temperatures and poor air quality can cause a variety of health concerns.

Exposure and health effects

Poor air quality including the small smoke particles may cause health concerns such as:

- Aggravation of lung conditions - asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
- Itchy or burning eyes
- Throat irritation and runny noses
- Reduction in visibility

If you or anyone else have asthma or lung conditions and start to develop symptoms such as shortness of breath, coughing or wheezing, follow your asthma/COPD action plan and inform your manager or supervisor immediately of any health concerns.

Working in high temperatures or for long periods of strenuous activity, can place pressure on the body's cooling system leading heat related illnesses. These can include dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. It may also lead to an increase in other injuries such as slips or loss of hand grip on tools due to a loss of concentration and decreased motor skills.

Some warning signs of heat-related illnesses include:

- Headaches
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Cramps
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Irritability
- Heavy sweating
- Confusion/ Clumsiness
- Fainting

If you feel heat related symptoms, notify your Supervisor or Manager immediately and take a rest break in a cool environment.



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Precautionary measures

Over the summer period whether you are at work or on holidays, during the smoky conditions and high temperatures the health departments are recommending to (where possible):

- Avoid vigorous exercise (especially if you have asthma or lung conditions)
- Stay indoors with windows and doors closed (and in air-conditioning if possible)
- If you are working outdoors, and you are using P2 face mask or respirator mask they need to be fitted in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions to ensure a good seal around the face (mouth and nose)
- Take advantage of any breaks in the smoky conditions to allow for fresh air in your work areas or in your home, but to close windows and doors again before conditions deteriorate
- Use the recycle air function in your vehicle
- Drink water before you are thirsty and regularly throughout the day
- Take regular breaks in a cool environment and ensure you eat during meal breaks
- If working in direct sunlight, wear a hat, long sleeved clothing and sunscreen with a minimum SPF 30+
- Avoid coffee and tea as they accelerate water loss in the body
- At home, keep a watchful eye on your pets for any changes to their health and behaviour, and when air quality is poor to limit their time outdoors.

