Keeping Your Cool When Feeling Hot Around The Collar!

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Preventing Heat Exhaustion During the Summer

Feeling the sun on your back on a hot, humid summer day may feel good for the short term but can cause a number of problems. Nationwide, there are 240 heat-related deaths per year (source: American Academy of Family Physicians). In Kentucky last year, the Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Program (FACE) recorded 2 occupationally-related deaths due to heat exhaustion/heat overexertion.

Last summer, one work-related case involved the death of a male carpenter from hyperthermia (a very high body temperature) and heat exposure while he was building a house in the Lexington area. The victim became hot after being on the job for a while and sat down to rest. Later in the day, he was transported to the University of Kentucky hospital where he died that same evening.

A second occupational death occurred when a male construction worker was stringing fence beside a rural industrial parkway. While stringing the fence, the worker collapsed and died at the scene. The heat index (how the temperature feels when air temperature and humidity are combined) for that day was 97. The local coroner concluded that the construction worker died of hyperthermia and exposure to heat.

When the temperature outside is very hot and the humidity is high, extra care needs to be taken. When working in high temperatures and humidity remember:

- Drink plenty of fluids while working, but avoid caffeinated drinks which could contribute to fluid loss.
- Do not drink alcohol the night before working outside in high heat and humidity because you could become dehydrated and this could cause heat exhaustion.
- Wear loose, light colored clothing. Dark clothing tends to increase the feel of the heat from the sun.
- Take frequent breaks or rest times. Don't overdo it while working on a job during periods of extreme temperature and/or heat. It's better to be healthy than to prove yourself a he-man by remaining in the sun or heat too long. If you're feeling faint or dizzy, take a break!
- Adjust yourself slowly to working in hot weather so that your body becomes used to working everyday in high heat and humid conditions.

Kentucky FACE is an occupational fatality surveillance and intervention project. Its purpose is to collect data on work-related fatalities in Kentucky and to develop recommendations and strategies for prevention.

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