
OSHA's 5-Step Heat Plan Explained

OSHA's Heat National Emphasis Program has been extended through April 2026. In its first two years, the program led to 7,000 heat-related inspections. Is your business prepared for a targeted OSHA heat inspection?

This month, we will outline the essential steps every employer should take to protect workers from heat-related hazards. Mitigating any recognized hazard begins with a plan, employee education, and effective controls.

Step 1: Start with a Plan

OSHA offers a [model Heat Illness Prevention Plan¹](#) that employers can use as a starting point. Inspectors will often begin an inspection by asking to review your written plan. A comprehensive heat plan should address five key areas:

- Training for workers and supervisors
- Monitoring workplace conditions
- Conducting heat assessments
- Implementing hazard controls
- Preparing for medical emergencies

Training and controls will be discussed in later sections, so let's first look at monitoring, assessment, and emergency planning.

Step 2: Monitor Environmental Conditions

Assign a qualified person to monitor heat conditions in the workplace. Environmental heat isn't just about air temperature—it also includes humidity, radiant heat (from the sun or machinery), and air movement. OSHA's [Heat Safety Tool App²](#) helps calculate heat index values and risk levels. For greater accuracy, consider obtaining the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT), which provides a more comprehensive assessment of environmental heat stress.

Step 3: Conduct Heat Assessments

A heat assessment combines environmental data with the physical demands of employees' tasks to determine risk levels. Once exposure is identified, employers must implement appropriate controls. The written plan should also address emergency response—particularly for heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Important: Simply planning to call 911 is not a sufficient emergency response. Your plan must include specific procedures to reduce a worker's core body temperature and provide immediate care. Can you and your team recognize the signs of heat stroke? Do you know when and how to intervene?

Step 4: Train Workers and Supervisors

OSHA requires that employees be trained on the hazards present in their work environment—including heat illness. Training should cover the symptoms and progression of heat stress, which may begin with a rash or cramps, escalate to exhaustion, and potentially lead to heat stroke or even death. Heat stroke occurs when the body's thermoregulatory system fails and critical functions begin to shut down—similar to hypothermia, but from excessive heat rather than cold. Prompt recognition and action can save lives.

Step 5: Implement Controls

The human body can adapt to heat over time, but acclimatization is critical—especially for new or young summer workers who are not used to physical labor or hot environments.

OSHA already requires access to cool drinking water on all worksites. Additional controls may include:

- Cool-down breaks
- Shaded or air-conditioned rest areas
- Modifying working hours

When engineering or administrative controls are not feasible, appropriate personal protective equipment can help reduce risk, such as wide-brimmed mesh hats or cooling vests.

Putting It All Together

By downloading, reviewing, and implementing OSHA's sample Heat Illness Prevention Program, employers will be better equipped to safeguard their workers.

If you have questions or need assistance developing your program, the Illinois On-Site Safety and Health Consultation Program can help. The Illinois Department of Labor offers free consultation services for small and medium-sized businesses, including on-site visits, program development, training, and even air and noise sampling.



This no-cost service, funded primarily by a federal grant through the 21(d) On-Site Consultation Cooperative Agreement, can help you build a safer, more compliant workplace—and may even lower your workers' compensation premiums.

Visit <https://worksafe.illinois.gov> or contact Harry “Hap” Hileman at 217-993-2111 or harry.hileman@illinois.gov for more information.

Note: This program is 90% federally funded, with 10% provided by the State of Illinois.

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1. <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/2021-07/Model%20Heat%20Illness%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>
 2. <https://www.osha.gov/heat/heat-app>

Summary: OSHA's Heat National Emphasis Program has been extended until April 2026. It urges businesses to prepare for inspections by developing a comprehensive heat illness prevention plan that includes training, monitoring, and emergency protocols.