

California Introduces New Indoor Heat Protection Measures

On July 23, 2024, the Office of Administrative Law in California approved emergency regulations proposed by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, commonly known as Cal/OSHA. These new regulations, which went into effect immediately, aim to improve worker safety in extreme heat conditions, a growing concern in the state. These changes have significant implications for [employers and workers](#) alike, particularly in industries where outdoor work or exposure to high temperatures is common.

Here's a breakdown of the new regulations, their rationale, and how they impact businesses across California.

Why the New Regulations?

California's climate is famous for its diversity, with coastal areas enjoying mild weather, while inland regions experience extreme heat, especially during the summer. Heatwaves have become more frequent and intense due to climate change, increasing the risks for workers exposed to hot environments. Workers in sectors like agriculture, construction, landscaping, and transportation are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illnesses, which range from heat exhaustion to life-threatening heatstroke.

Cal/OSHA's new emergency regulations were introduced as a direct response to rising temperatures and the dangers posed to workers. Over the years, there have been reports of fatalities and serious health issues linked to heat exposure, underscoring the need for stricter safety measures. These regulations are designed to provide enhanced protections, with the goal of minimizing the risks associated with extreme heat.

Key Requirements Under the New Regulations

The new Cal/OSHA rules introduce several critical measures to protect workers from heat-related risks. Below are the key components of the regulations:

Heat Illness Prevention Plan

A cornerstone of the new regulations is the requirement for all employers to establish a **Heat Illness Prevention Plan**. This comprehensive plan must outline strategies for preventing heat-related illnesses and protecting employees in high-heat conditions. Specifically, the plan should address:

- **Risk Assessment:** Identifying high-heat areas and tasks that may expose workers to dangerous conditions.
- **Access to Shade and Water:** Ensuring that workers have frequent access to shaded areas and ample drinking water to stay hydrated.
- **Emergency Procedures:** Establishing clear protocols for responding to heat-related illnesses, including how to provide immediate assistance to affected workers.

The aim of this plan is to ensure that businesses are prepared to manage heat exposure risks effectively, providing a safer work environment for employees who are vulnerable to the hazards of high temperatures.

Employee Training

Employee education and awareness play a pivotal role in preventing heat-related illnesses. Under the new regulations, employers are required to provide **training** for their workers, focused on:

- The **symptoms and dangers** of heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion and heatstroke.
- **Preventative measures** workers can take, such as staying hydrated, taking breaks, and recognizing the importance of shade.
- Steps to take in the event of a **heat-related emergency**, including when and how to seek medical attention.

This training must be tailored to the specific risks employees face based on their work environment and tasks. For example, workers in agriculture might receive guidance on how to work safely during peak heat hours, while construction workers could learn about the additional risks posed by heavy protective clothing.

Temperature Monitoring and Recordkeeping

Workplaces where temperatures exceed 87°F, or where workers wear clothing that limits heat dissipation or are exposed to radiant heat sources, must now implement **temperature monitoring**. Employers are required to:

- Regularly monitor and record temperature levels to assess risk.
- Take proactive measures if temperatures reach dangerous levels.
- Keep records of temperature data to ensure that they are complying with the regulations and can respond quickly if conditions worsen.

These measures help businesses stay on top of changing heat conditions and prevent incidents before they occur.

Administrative and Engineering Controls

When temperatures exceed 82°F, employers must apply **administrative and engineering controls** to manage heat exposure. These controls include:

- **Administrative controls:** Adjusting work schedules to avoid the hottest parts of the day or rotating employees to minimize individual heat exposure.
- **Engineering controls:** Implementing physical changes to the work environment, such as adding ventilation, fans, or cooling stations to help reduce heat accumulation.

Both of these controls are critical in ensuring that workers are not unnecessarily exposed to high temperatures for extended periods, which can significantly reduce the likelihood of heat-related illnesses.

Implementing the New Regulations

To comply with these regulations, California businesses must adopt a proactive approach to managing heat risks. This involves a series of steps:

Review and Update Heat Illness Prevention Plans

Employers should start by reviewing any existing heat illness prevention measures to ensure they meet the new requirements. Plans should be comprehensive, with detailed procedures for risk assessment, emergency response, and provision of water and shade.

Enhance Employee Training Programs

Training programs must be up-to-date, incorporating the latest information about heat-related illnesses and prevention strategies. Employers should ensure that all staff are aware of the symptoms of heat illness and know how to respond if they or their colleagues are affected.

Implement Temperature Monitoring Systems

For businesses operating in high-heat environments, implementing systems to monitor and record temperature levels is essential. Employers should invest in reliable equipment for temperature checks and ensure that records are kept consistently.

Apply Administrative and Engineering Controls

Finally, employers must make sure that both administrative and engineering controls are in place. This may involve making schedule adjustments, installing new equipment, or creating shaded areas where workers can take breaks.

The Impact on California Businesses

The approval of these emergency regulations by Cal/OSHA highlights the state's commitment to protecting workers from the increasing dangers of extreme heat. For businesses, compliance is not only a legal obligation but also an ethical responsibility to ensure the health and safety of employees.

Adhering to these new rules will require investment in training, infrastructure, and monitoring systems. However, the benefits of compliance extend beyond avoiding fines or penalties. By prioritizing employee safety, businesses can reduce absenteeism, improve worker morale, and prevent costly incidents related to heat-related illnesses.

Moreover, in an era of heightened public awareness around [worker safety and environmental sustainability](#), companies that lead the way in protecting their workforce can enhance their reputations and build trust with both employees and customers.

The new Cal/OSHA emergency regulations on heat exposure represent a significant step toward improving workplace safety in California. As temperatures continue to rise, these regulations ensure that workers are protected from the risks of extreme heat. For businesses, this means updating safety plans, investing in training, and implementing proactive controls to manage heat risks effectively.

By embracing these changes, California employers can not only comply with the law but also contribute to a safer, healthier work environment. Ultimately, this will help foster a culture of safety and well-being, benefiting both employees and organizations alike.

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