

MOHSS

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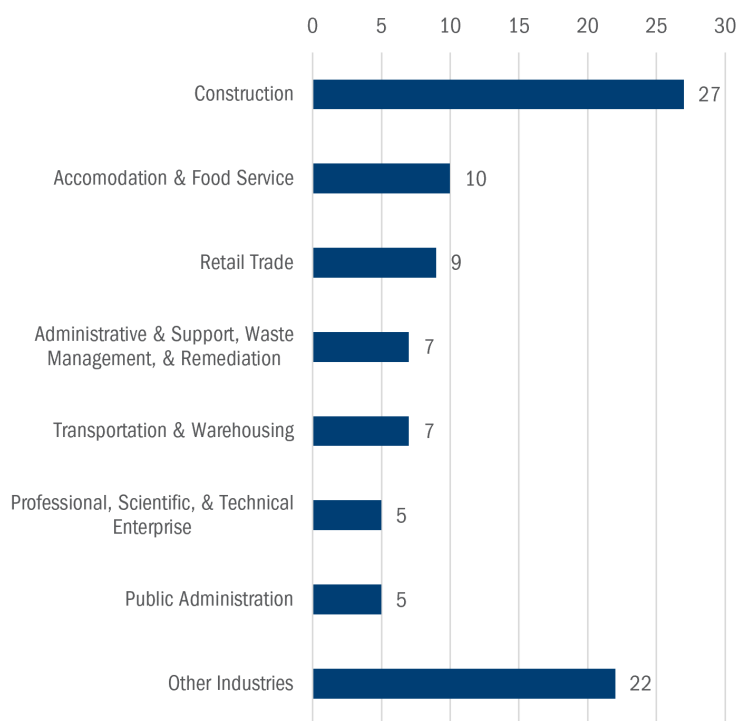
Staying Cool at Work

Montana's long, hot summer days are here. While these conditions are ideal for outdoor recreation, heat presents a source of danger to workers. This edition of the MOHSS topics newsletter examines the impact of high heat on the Montana workforce and provides guidance for keeping workers healthy.

Understanding Heat in the Workplace

In considering how to protect workers against the effects of heat, employers should recognize where heat originates from and how it impacts workers. Heat can come from both natural sources (e.g. the sun, fire, etc.) and man-made sources (e.g. machinery, substances, etc.). Heat sources can be found in most workplaces, but outdoor and unventilated indoor workplaces are more likely to experience the impacts of environmental heat. As a workplace heats up, it prompts natural cooling responses like sweating from workers, but excessive heat can overwhelm these responses, leading to a variety of symptoms and conditions including heat exhaustion and heatstroke.¹ Prolonged exposure can result in damage to internal organs, which can be fatal. Additionally, recent publications suggest that workers exposed to excessive heat are at elevated risk of injury from strains, falls, and other causes as a result of fatigue.²

Heat-Related Injuries by Industry, 2016-2025



Heat-Related Injuries and Illnesses in Montana

From 2016 to 2025, about 90 cases of workplace heat exhaustion or heatstroke were reported to the Montana Department of Labor & Industry as workers' compensation claims.³ Of these, about a third were reported by workers in the construction industry, and other employees from industries operating fully or partly outdoors such as accommodation and food service and retail trade represented substantial groups as well. While injury counts were low, especially compared to the number of workers in these industries, it is important to note that heat exhaustion and heatstroke can be difficult to identify and connect to work activities.

The impact of heat-related illness on the Montana workforce can also be examined using emergency department visit data from the Montana Hospital Association, provided by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. In the past 10 years, 52 patients visited emergency rooms around the state for heat-related illnesses which occurred in a workplace covered under workers' compensation.⁴ These cases only comprised about 4.5% of all emergency room visits for heat-related illness; however, additional work-related cases (from those in workers' compensation-exempt workplaces like small agricultural operations, independent contractors, etc.) likely exist within the 1,144 total admissions for heat-related illness that occurred during this period.

Guidance to Avoid Overheating

Montana has relatively few cases of heat related injury and illness compared to most other states, but warmer and longer summers are likely to increase worker exposure to heat. Preventing further cases of heat exhaustion and heatstroke in the workplace will involve educating workers on the dangers of heat, implementing various controls against heat, and planning to perform work differently as the conditions require. These steps may include:

- Educating workers and supervisors to recognize signs of heat-related illness in themselves and others
- Providing cold water at work and break locations and ensure workers are drinking it
- Providing workers with heat-protecting clothing
- Limiting time in hot environments and scheduling regular water breaks in shaded or cooled spaces
- Using tools or equipment to reduce the physical demands of work
- Ensuring proper staffing to reduce the amount of work each individual worker performs
- Altering work times to adjust for forecast heat (i.e. working early in the morning or in the evening)

More information can be found on the [Heat Stress Recommendations webpage](#) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the [Heat Illness Prevention webpage](#) of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and from contacting a workers' compensation insurer. By recognizing the hazards presented by heat and making easy adjustments to a work plan, employers and workers can stay safe and productive, making the most of the summertime.

¹ From "[Heat-Related Illnesses](#)", National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

² From "[Impact of Excessive Heat on the Frequency of Work-Related Injuries](#)", Workers' Compensation Research Institute

³ From the Workers' Compensation Administrative Network, Montana Department of Labor & Industry

⁴ From the Hospital Discharge Data System, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

