

## Working Safely in the Heat

Working in the heat is a safety hazard. Heat stress makes people tired, hurts their work performance, increases chance of injury, and can be fatal. Road crews often work in high temperatures and humidity, under full sun, with little or no wind, while wearing heavy or restrictive protective gear and under intense physical exertion. This is the perfect combination for heat-related illness.

### Heat-Related Illnesses

When working in a hot environment, the body's temperature increases, in an attempt to maintain its normal temperature, it transfers the heat back into the environment through sweat. The hotter it gets, the harder the body must work to stay cool. When it has absorbed more heat than it can dissipate, heat related illnesses can strike. Illnesses range from mild prickly heat, muscle cramps and swelling, to severe heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. The first warning signs of heat stress are sluggishness and a foggy feeling. As the body loses fluid the condition worsens. Cramps, dizziness, and fainting follows, leading to heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

### Prevention

Most heat-related illnesses are preventable by keeping the body cool and well-hydrated.

- Before work begins, drink water until feeling full. Drink water, fruit juice, or sports drink (5 to 7 ounces) as often as every 15 minutes. Keep drinking all day.
- If work allows, wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing. Sweat soaked clothes are cooler than bare skin. Choose and use the hard-hat with the widest brim. Don't forget sunscreen.
- Cool down by resting in a cool, shady spot or, if possible, in air conditioning. Encourage the supervisor to plan work so the heaviest work is done during the coolest time of day. Work in the shade whenever possible.
- Get sufficient sleep and good nutrition. Eat smaller meals before work activity. Avoid caffeine, alcohol and large amounts of sugar and salt.

Source:

*Staying Healthy in the Work zone: working in the Heat*, Oregon Roads, Spring 2005, Number 78, p 7-8

*Road Business* is a quarterly publication of the University of New Hampshire Technology Transfer Center  
UNH T<sup>2</sup> Center Staff  
Charles Goodspeed, TRCG Director  
Kathy L. DesRoches, Director of Educational Programs & *Road Business* Editor  
Katy Claytor, Program Assistant  
Kristen Gallup, Project Assistant

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), and UNH support the Technology Transfer Center. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations presented in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FHWA, NHDOT, or UNH. Any product mentioned in the *Road Business* is for information only and should not be considered a product endorsement.