

Water Does a Body Good

Every year around the country, summer temperatures reach record-breaking highs, while the concrete industry toils on erecting buildings, constructing high-rises, and paving roads. And as the heat rises, so do the concerns about proper hydration for construction workers.

“Construction is physically intensive work, which that in it self is taxing on the body,” says Grace Fox, safety director for Houston-based T.A.S. Commercial Concrete Construction. “By the time you add heat in the high double digits or triple digits, add humidity, and the lack of rain—all of these add up to some serious health effects even on perfectly healthy employees.”

Everyone knows it's important to stay hydrated, especially during the

hot summer months and working long strenuous hours, but it bears repeating. Fox says T.A.S. begins a proactive educational campaign well before the temperatures start to rise. In Texas, this can be as early as March. This education effort includes e-mails, voicemails, newsletters, daily reminders through field supervisors, and even information on the employee's checks. “It's an educational process that has to start early,” Fox says. “The most important thing is to educate the workers on the symptoms and about avoiding heat-related injuries.”

Catch dehydration in time

Education starts with the warning signs, which for mild to moderate dehydration include thirst, dry sticky

mouth, dark yellow urine, loss of elasticity in skin, sleepiness or tiredness, headache, dizziness or light-headedness, muscle weakness, and fatigue. Symptoms worsen with severe dehydration leading to extreme thirst, very dry mouth, lack of sweating, little urination, sunken eyes, shriveled and dry skin, low blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, and fever. These indicators can be life threatening and need immediate medical attention. T.A.S. encourages employees to pass along complaints of any of these symptoms to management so proper attention can be given if dehydration, or worse a heat-related illness, occurs.

When you realize that you've become dehydrated, start replacing fluids immediately. In order to pre-



vent dehydration, drink before, throughout the workday, and after to ensure you're getting enough water. There also are hydration packs that you can wear on your back for constant hydration. Sports drinks also are a good way to stay hydrated, replace lost electrolytes and minerals, and come in a variety of flavors. Avoid drinking coffee, tea, soda, or alcohol, which act as diuretics and dehydrate you further.

quickly you can become dehydrated.

Thirst is another traditional tell-tale sign, but most experts believe that by the time you feel thirsty, you've already lost a significant amount of water. A better gauge is to check the color of your urine. Clear or light-colored urine indicates adequate hydration, whereas dark yellow or amber signals your body is dehydrated.

Being dehydrated can lead to a

What's enough?

How much water do you need to drink? The recommended eight 8-ounce glasses a day can be misleading because everyone's needs are different. Type of activity performed, temperature, clothing, diet, and fitness level are just a few factors that influence how

loss in concentration, headaches, dizziness, and lightheadedness, as well as less focus on the task at hand; a dangerous situation when dealing with complex machinery. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) "Working in Hot Environments," more accidents happen in hotter weather. "Working in a hot environment lowers the mental alertness and physical performance of an individual. Increased body temperature and physical discomfort promote irritability, anger, and other emotional states which sometimes cause workers to overlook safety procedures or to divert attention from hazardous tasks."

Repeat after me

Although it may be redundant, remember to get plenty of fluids on the job. Even though your company is required by law to provide water on the job, it's your personal responsibility to stay hydrated. So drink up!

— *Kate Hamilton*