

Warm weather working

(You never know, it could happen)

The Diggers' Forum committee have put together a few handy hints and tips to help get through the summer (both weeks of it) as we all optimistically look forward to warmer days and heady temperatures of above 17 degrees Celsius.

There should be a section in your risk assessment about working in warm weather.

Your employer should have a **risk assessment** for working in warm weather. Familiarise yourself with it and make sure it is being adhered to on site. Have you been provided with sun cream? Is your PPE right for the conditions or are you still in insulated waterproofs?) If not talk to your site management team as they may not be aware of the situation.

As outdoor workers Diggers are exposed to high temperatures for long periods and are at a higher-than-average risk of overexposure to UV radiation. Along with those ridiculous tan lines, this can lead to **heat stroke**, **heat exhaustion**, and of course, **skin damage** which in turn can lead to an increased risk of **skin cancer**.

To protect against these risks

Wear sunscreen, especially if its windy. Ideally this should be of a high factor and re-applied regularly.

- try to reschedule work for **cooler times of the day**, such as earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon when levels of UVR are less intense. Mattocking through that concrete layer might be best done early in the morning when the ground is more likely to be damp (especially if you have soaked it the day before and covered it over night with a tarp or Terram)
- **try to stay out of the sun** during the hottest part of the day. We know that this is almost impossible in the field, so try to rotate between indoor/shaded and outdoor tasks to minimise exposure. Maybe save up less strenuous tasks like paperwork/section drawing for the hottest part of the day and do them in the shade if possible
- **wear sunscreen** especially if its windy. Ideally this should be of a high factor and re-applied regularly. Your employer should provide a generic brand of sunscreen, but as an ever-present risk its also best to have your own.

Drink plenty of cool water and keep hydrated. Your company should make sure that you are provided with sufficient drinking water.

- **cover up** using lightweight material where you can. The best way to avoid being burned by the sun is to keep it away from your skin. Long sleeves might seem like a hassle, but no one wants to end up looking like an old leather sofa.
- **stay hydrated** by drinking plenty of cool water. You should be provided with sufficient drinking water AND drinking vessels, but it may be best for your health and that of the planet to bring your own reusable water bottle. Drink small amounts of water regularly – if you feel thirsty, you're already dehydrated.

Heat stroke is more likely when heavy physical work is being done, so pace yourself and vary your work.

Heat exhaustion is caused by the loss of salt and water from the body by excessive sweating. Left untreated it can lead to heat stroke, so it is important to take care of yourself. Signs to look out for are:

- headache, dizziness, and confusion
- loss of appetite and nausea
- sweating, with pale, clammy skin
- cramps in the arms, legs, or abdomen

Report any symptoms of heat stroke, exhaustion or burning to your supervisor or on-site first aider.

Heat stroke is the most severe form of heat-related conditions and is caused by the failure of the body to regulate temperature, resulting in the body becoming dangerously overheated. Symptoms include:

- headache, dizziness, and discomfort
- restlessness and confusion
- hot, flushed, and dry skin
- body temperature of above 40°C

Take **extra rest breaks**, whenever you feel you need one (but don't take advantage), and make sure there is shade in rest areas, **remove PPE when resting** to help encourage heat loss. Clothing (including PPE) should ideally not be tight or restricting, it should allow body heat to escape.

Report any symptoms of heat stroke/exhaustion/burning to your supervisor or on-site first aider.

Useful links:

www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/outdoor-working.htm

www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/index.htm

www.sunsafeworkplaces.co.uk

