

Working Safely in the Summer Heat

Nothing beats spending a day in the sunshine, at work and at play! The communities surrounding CapU present lots of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, but too much unprotected time in the sun and heat can lead to serious injuries and illnesses. Those who work outside are 2.5 – 3.5 times more likely to develop skin cancer and last year in BC almost 600 people died due to heat-related illness (WSBC).

There are many benefits to working outside in the summer but it's important to understand the potential hazards and take the right steps to protect yourself from heat-related illnesses.

Sun and heat hazards

Heat Related Illnesses occur when we lose fluids and salt through sweating. Our bodies typically operate between 36 and 38 degrees Celsius and serious illnesses can result when we get hotter than that. Here are a few of the potential hazards associated with working and playing in the sun and heat:

- **Heat rash** is an uncomfortable rash that can be caused when sweat glands are blocked, which then causes inflammation
- **Heat cramps** are involuntary muscle spasms that occur during heavy lifting and working in hot environments. Heat cramps often present themselves later in the day after muscles have cooled off
- **Heat exhaustion** occurs in conditions of extreme heat and excessive sweating without adequate fluid and salt replacement. In most cases symptoms will improve quickly once removed from the hot, sunny environment
- **Heat stroke** is a life-threatening emergency that occurs when the body temperature rises above 41 degrees. The most important difference between heat exhaustion and heat stroke is an absence of sweating

Exposure to Ultraviolet (UV) can cause **sunburns, eye irritation, skin cancer, and blindness**. Sunlight exposure is highest during the summer and between 10:00am and 4:00pm Working outdoors during this time increases the chances of getting sunburned and long-term exposure can lead to some types of skin cancer.

Protect yourself from the hazards of sun and heat

- **Cover up & protect** - apply (and reapply frequently) sunscreen, wear loose fitting clothes, UV rated sunglasses and hat with a brim
- **Drink up** - thirsty or not, drink a cup of water every 15 to 20 minutes when exerting yourself in the heat
- **Shield from the Sun** - wherever possible move your work from the sun to a shaded area
- **Time it right** - when possible schedule your most strenuous work to avoid the hottest time of the day, between 10am and 4pm
- **Cool off** - don't overexert yourself! Take breaks, get help and cool off in the shade or an air-conditioned building or vehicle

If you feel sick while working in the heat or experience any of the signs and symptoms of a heat related illness or UV radiation stop work right away and inform your supervisor, first aid or a member of the safety team.

Safety is a priority at CapU! You are expected to complete your tasks in a manner that doesn't put yourself, others or the environment at risk. **Never walk past an unsafe act or condition** and if you see something that can't be corrected right away, secure it and inform your supervisor and the safety department.