

10 ways to prevent heat stress in retail kitchens

A recent Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS)-supported pilot study of heat stress in retail kitchens found that peak temperatures at some sites exceeded threshold limit values (TLVs) and workers showed heat-related symptoms even at temperatures within recommended limits. Could this be possible in your restaurant or hotel kitchen?

Heat stress may lead to heat stroke, which can be fatal. Even mild symptoms of heat stress could be hazardous if workers are distracted and have trouble focusing on the task at hand. As our climate changes, these heat stress hazards could grow, especially in workplaces with process heat.

10 best practices

We asked WSPS Occupational Hygiene Specialist Warren Clements for suggestions on how to keep kitchen workers safe from heat stress during any season.

"With an assortment of hot surfaces and appliances - grills, ovens, stoves, pasta cookers, fryers and dishwashers - it's impossible to avoid heat and humidity in the retail kitchen," says Warren. High heat and humidity affect our body's ability to cool itself. To stay within TLV guidelines, which aim to prevent our core body temperature from rising above 38°C, use a combination of engineering controls, administrative controls and safe work practices, says Warren.

Engineering controls

1. Use air conditioning, spot cooling fans, evaporative coolers, air circulators and local exhaust ventilation to keep workers as cool as possible. Ensure local exhaust ventilation is present in industrial kitchens over all sources of heat, such as grills, fryers, sauté stations and conveyor ovens.

Administrative controls

2. Acclimatize workers to hot environments. Employers can help workers build up a tolerance to high temperatures by initially limiting shift time, slowly integrating them into the hot working conditions.
3. Ensure potable water is available at all times.
4. Design work schedules with adequate rest and hydration breaks.
5. Train everyone on the signs of heat stress. Emphasize heat stress awareness in first aid training.
6. Balance tasks so workers spend time in areas that are cooler, such as the front of house.

Safe work practices for workers

7. Ensure employees drink lots of water even if they're not thirsty and limit consumption of caffeinated beverages, which can be dehydrating.
8. Ask workers to wear comfortable, loose clothing made of cotton where suitable.
9. Staff should place wet cloths on their face or neck to stay cool.
10. Encourage workers to speak up if they feel ill, need a break or see signs of heat stress in others.

Also, carry out regular inspections of the facilities to determine whether controls are working and thoroughly investigate any heat stress incidents, just as you would any injury.

For more information on preventing heat stress in your workplace, check out WSPS' [heat stress resource page for tools](#) including: a downloadable heat stress poster, checklist, guidelines, articles, and more.

This article was prepared by Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS). For more information, visit www.wspss.ca or contact WSPS at customercare@wspss.ca.

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