



Foros Comercio Ético
Ethical Trade Forums

Guide on Prevention Against Extreme Heat at Work

1. Introduction

The agri-food sector, like many others, faces unavoidable challenges derived from climate change, which have significantly increased the episodes of extreme heat, characterised by high temperatures and prolonged exposure to the sun. These episodes pose a significant risk to companies and their workers, since not only their performance can be affected but also their health and well-being too. Given this reality, it is imperative that companies adopt measures and protocols to protect their workers and guarantee a safe and healthy work environment in conditions of extreme heat.

From the Ethical Trade Forums, we wanted to contribute in a small way by compiling this document, which includes some of the key aspects that must be considered when working in extreme heat conditions. We have used some of the very useful and visual resources from the [National Institute of Social Security \(INSS\) regarding the prevention of heat strokes](#).

The content of this document has been produced at a generic level. Each company has the responsibility to create and adapt their prevention and action plan to their individual circumstances (type of work, location, workers, etc.).

2. Preparation of a Prevention Plan

Every responsible company must elaborate a prevention plan for dealing with extreme heat at work. Some important aspects to consider are:

- **Assess the risk that exists** and the local weather conditions to determine the likelihood of when extreme heat events will occur. A very useful resource is the [AEMET weather alerts](#).
- **Analysis of tasks at work** that involve greater exposure to heat and/or intense physical effort, to prioritise accordingly.
- **Training and capacity building** of workers (supervisors, middle managers, etc.) on the risk of extreme heat, its symptoms and how to act in the event of an emergency. A monitoring and supervision system should be established to enable workers to recognise the signs of heat fatigue and take appropriate action.
- **Adopt preventive measures** to guarantee the safety and health of workers that must be implemented in the workplace. We list the main preventive measures in section 4.
- **Establishment of an emergency and first-aid plan**, including steps to be taken in case of heat stroke or other heat-related emergencies. It is important to train workers in basic first aid.

It is important that the prevention plan is backed by the commitment of the company's management, regularly evaluated, and effectively communicated to workers for their active participation. It is the responsibility of the company to implement this management plan, and of the workers to be aware of the risk they face and to comply with said preventive measures.

3. Identification of Risks and Symptoms

The following are some of the main risks faced by workers during extreme heat events.

- **Heat stroke:** a serious and potentially fatal medical emergency as the body is unable to self-regulate its internal temperature. [INSS video on how to prevent heat stroke](#). Some of the symptoms:
 - a. High body temperature (even exceeding 40°C).
 - b. Hot, dry and reddened skin, intense headache.
 - c. Fatigue, hyperventilation, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.
 - d. Altered mental state, convulsions, delirium, even coma.
 - e. First manifestation may be loss of consciousness.
- **Dehydration:** prolonged exposure to extreme heat may cause fluid loss, which can lead to dehydration and cause fatigue, weakness, or muscle cramps.
- **Heat exhaustion:** less severe form of heat stroke, but just as worrying. Symptoms: weakness, dizziness, extreme sweating, or rapid pulse.
- **Prolonged exposure to solar radiation** without adequate protection can have health consequences such as skin and eye lesions or, most seriously, skin cancer. [INSS video to prevent negative consequences to prolonged exposure to solar radiation](#).
- **Many others** such as:
 - a. Increased physical stress.
 - b. Fatigue and decreased concentration.
 - c. Cardiovascular and respiratory problems.
 - d. Long-term heat-related illnesses.

Exposure to extreme heat without taking appropriate preventive measures increases the risk of occupational accidents as many of its symptoms increase the probability of those accidents happening.

4. Adoption of Preventive Measures

The INSS publishes a [decalogue of preventive measures](#), to which we add and combine some other measures from experience.

- Plan your day and get information of the weather forecast on a daily basis.
 - The State Meteorological Agency (AEMET), on its website, provides weather forecasts, alerts and [warnings](#).
- Acclimatise to the heat gradually.
 - Reduce the temperature indoors (fans, opening windows, air conditioning, etc.).
 - Inform workers of the risks, effects and preventive measures against extreme heat.
- Plan work to avoid or reduce exposure during the central hours of the day, especially from 10:00 to 16:00, and carry out more strenuous tasks during cooler hours.

- Provided shaded, well-ventilated rest areas and take breaks more frequently.
- Adapt the workplace.
 - Use available mechanical resources/aids to limit or reduce physical work.
 - Check with your doctor if you have chronic illnesses or are taking medication.
 - Specific monitoring to workers at greater risks (over 55 years of age, with cardiovascular or respiratory problems, etc.).
 - Allow workers to rest when they need to, including increasing the number of breaks.
- Hydrate constantly, **by drinking WATER!**
 - Do not drink alcoholic, caffeinated, or sugary drinks, or take drugs.
 - The company must ensure the supply of drinking water to its workers.
 - Avoid heavy meals and eat fruit and vegetables.
- Wear loose-fitting, breathable clothing, preferably natural, cool fabrics (such as cotton, linen) and light colours that reflect the radiant heat.
- Cover your head and protect your eyes by wearing, for example, breathable (wide-brimmed) hats, and sunglasses.
- Apply appropriate sun protection and renew it regularly.
- Avoid working alone.

It is the responsibility of both, the company and workers, to ensure that the prevention plan and preventive measures are being properly implemented and to rectify those that are not, immediately.

5. What to do in the Event of a Heat Stroke

If you notice that a person is suffering from heat stroke, **CALL FOR HELP, BY DIALING THE EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBER 112**. In the meantime:

- a. Move the person to a cool place and in a semi-sitting position, to encourage breathing.
- b. Ensure that she/he drinks water in small sips (if conscious).
- c. To reduce body temperature, remove some clothing, provide some fresh air with a fan and apply cool and damp cloths to the forehead, back of the neck and neck.
- d. Once the person's condition has improved, he/she should be taken to an emergency medical service for a thorough examination.
- e. If the person does not recover, or loses consciousness, he/she should lie down with the legs bent and call 112 immediately (if this has not already been done).

The Health Services from Castilla-La Mancha, on their website, provide us with [this illustrative video](#) on how to act in the event of a heat stroke.