



Prepare for the Summer Heat

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As a professional truck driver, you know that the summer heat presents an array of driving challenges—on your body, on your equipment, and on those sharing the road with you. Therefore, it is important to fully understand what you can do to protect yourself and your equipment.

According to the National Safety Council, heatstroke is the most serious and life-threatening heat-related illness. In certain circumstances, your body can build up too much heat, your temperature may rise to life-threatening levels, and you can become delirious or lose consciousness. If you do not rid your body of excess heat fast enough, it "cooks" the brain and other vital organs. It is often fatal, and those who do survive may have permanent damage to their vital organs.

Symptoms of heatstroke include:

- The victim's body feels extremely hot when touched
- Altered mental status (behavior) ranging from slight confusion and disorientation to coma
- Conscious victims usually become irrational, agitated, or even aggressive and may have seizures
- In severe heatstroke, the victim can go into a coma in less than one hour

What should you do if you suspect heatstroke?

- Move person to a half-sitting position in the shade
- Call for emergency medical help immediately
- If humidity is below 75%, spray victim with water and vigorously fan. If humidity is above 75%, apply ice packs on neck, armpits or groin.

Heat exhaustion is characterized by heavy perspiration with normal or slightly above normal body temperatures. It is caused by water or salt depletion or both (severe dehydration). Heat exhaustion affects workers and athletes who do not drink enough fluids during work or exercise in hot environments.

Symptoms of heat exhaustion include:

- Severe thirst, fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting and sometimes diarrhea
- The affected person often mistakenly believes they have the flu
- Uncontrolled heat exhaustion can evolve into heatstroke
- Profuse sweating
- Clammy or pale skin
- Dizziness
- Rapid pulse
- Normal or slightly above normal body temperature

What should you do if you suspect heat exhaustion?

- Sit or lie down in the shade
- Drink cool water or a sports drink
- If persistent, gently apply wet towels and call for emergency medical help

Heat cramps are painful muscular spasms that happen suddenly, affecting the legs or abdominal muscles. They usually happen after physical activity in people who sweat a lot or have not had enough fluids.

What should you do?

- Sit or lie down in the shade
- Drink cool water or a sports drink
- Stretch affected muscles

These conditions can be further escalated by your physical condition. People at a greater risk for heat exhaustion and heat stroke are those with heart disease, skin diseases, endocrine disorders such as diabetes or hyperthyroidism, high blood pressure, insomnia or who are overweight.

What can you do to prevent heat-related diseases?

- Be prepared and use common sense.
- Limit your exposure to direct sunlight as much as possible. Drink more fluids (non-alcoholic); do not drink fluids that contain caffeine or large amounts of sugar. Sports drinks are good as they replace electrolytes and salt in your body. Avoid extremely cold fluids as these can cause stomach cramps. Drink often throughout the day, 4-6 ounces at a time.
- Wear light-weight, light-colored and loose-fitting clothing that does not create a safety hazard for your work environment. If outdoors, wear a hat to reduce direct exposure to the sun.
- Avoid hot foods and heavy meals. They add heat to your body.
- Consider packing a cooler with water for the day. Also, keep an umbrella in the truck if you are operating in extreme conditions (desolate, desert, etc.), this will allow you to move to an area with a breeze and still be protected from the sun.

Not only do the higher temperatures put stress on you, but the heat can also be a huge enemy of tires. Hot summer temperatures, under-inflated tires, heavy loads, and traveling at high speeds combine to create a recipe for tire disaster. That is exactly why you see more alligators on the highway in the summer season. During the winter or spring months, a tire that was being run under-inflated would have heat buildup that would dissipate into the atmosphere as the ambient temperature is cold. Now, when operating in temperatures in excess of 100 degrees, the heat will increase significantly in an under-inflated tire.

When a truck tire has been inflated to its proper air pressure according to the weight it is carrying, the operating temperature should be around 150 degrees. Let us assume that 100psi is the fleet standard. The rule of thumb is that for every loss in air pressure of 2psi, the tire temperature will increase 5 degrees.

As a result, tire pressure needs to be checked more frequently, preferably using a tire gauge. Also, tires should be inspected for irregular wear and other damage.

Finally, you should be especially cautious of construction zones this summer. States are making a concentrated effort to raise awareness of the dangers in these zones. Here are some safety tips you can share with your drivers regarding construction zones:

- Slow down and be alert when approaching a construction zone. Get into the correct lane well in advance. Where traffic is merging into a single lane, be cautious of other motorists racing to get ahead of slowing traffic.
- Get off the phone. Even hands-free phones distract your ability to safely operate your truck
- Pay attention to what warning signs are telling you to do.
- Be alert for the actions of other drivers.
- Pay close attention to construction equipment and workers. You never know their next move, so be prepared to stop.
- Watch for construction vehicles entering and exiting the road in or near the construction area, as they may enter and exit at a slower speed than other traffic.
- Turn on your headlights as you approach a work zone, alerting both the construction workers and other traffic around you of your presence.