



## LAW1199.COM NEWSLETTER™

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### HEAT EXPOSURE/HEAT DAMAGE

**BY: SCOTT A. O'MARA**

Heat exposure can be a very damaging element of the safety officers' assignments. There are numerous work placements that the safety officers are in that create heat-related injuries such as fire scenes, controlling traffic and accident scenes on hot days. Over a period of time these assignments, depending upon the level of heat temperature, can be a very significant factor in the manifestation and/or development of symptoms that are reflective of potential heat damage. Some of the exposures can have impact on your mental state; some of the exposures can have impact on your physical state. Being in the hot environment can impact many of your abilities. At higher levels of temperature for a longer period of time these exposures can alter the mental state and go as far to cause seizures depending upon the body temperature and your ability to hydrate.

Common sense is providing the safety officers the proper opportunity to hydrate and be in shaded or cool areas. The reality is that the common sense approach is not available in many assignments that they are in; such as emergency situations. The officer's awareness of heat-related nausea, dizziness, sweating and other factors need to be documented with their medical providers. This documentation can be a shell of protection.

There is another segment of the labor market that has heat exposures, and there is currently special legislation being proposed in the workers' compensation arena for agricultural workers regarding the pronounced heat exposures they have. Senate Bill 1336 is legislation that examines and acknowledges the heat-related exposures these agricultural workers have. This legislation would create a presumption that if these agricultural workers have said heat exposures they would be entitled to receive medical care and other ancillary factors because of the uniqueness of their exposures. This would be a presumption.

The acknowledgment of the heat exposures and impact upon this group of workers is accounting for their unique assignments. It must also create an awareness that another segment of our work force the safety officers have extreme heat-related exposures protecting our society. We as citizens need to make sure that these safety workers indeed can benefit from the medical care to cure and relieve the effects of these exposures. The burden of proof for these heat-related exposures and damages must fall within the presumption that is akin to heart, hernia, and cancer.

The safety workers unique mandate is that they must be on the scene to protect the citizens of California and do not many times have the options of avoidance of heat.

The impact can be extreme causing cardiovascular problems, dizziness and heating spell. This heating spell is called syncope. A protocol should be available to allow the safety officers to hydrate and be in shaded spots, many times this cannot occur because of the extended period of time required to protect. For the safety officers that are having continued symptoms, after or during the event, such as muscle cramps or spasms, it is important that they be aware that this could be an indication of heat exhaustion and they should seek medical care. Another factor is that they can develop a heat rash and this could be a situation that is long-lasting in the duties that they are performing.

The documentation of the first symptoms and any residual symptoms especially post the assignment is imperative. This documentation should be through a doctor or a medical facility. This again is significant if there is a continuation or symptoms post these exposures. If there is a continuation of symptoms a worker must file a claim form with the employer reflecting the assignments and the manifestation and development of the symptoms with the particular assignment.

There are times after the exposure to the heat there is a tolerance in the mind of the worker that they have the ability to return back to work and are not impacted, but yet they are impacted. Documentation is important. The workers' compensation system provides care to cure and relieve the effects of the injury, and the care to cure and relieve the effects of the injury may be short term if in fact there is a promising recovery. If there continues to be changes such as heat rashes and or other symptoms, this could be an indicated of a potential higher level of damage such as a stroke. Documentation is important. As indicated earlier, the workers' compensation system is acknowledging that agricultural workers in certain areas have a higher propensity for damages from the heat-related illnesses. This awareness should be also be transferred to the awareness that safety officers have with their particular assignments at times requirements to be exposed to high heat exposures. The exposures to the high heat again can be fire scenes, controlling traffic, and other situations on hot days. The impact is physical and the impact can be emotional. Documentation is paramount for protection.



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