



ANMF (Vic Branch) Policy

Guidelines for working in heat

1. Introduction

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Vic Branch) (ANMF (Vic Branch)) recognises that some nurses, midwives and carers working in healthcare environments and other industries may be exposed to heat during the course of their work, creating a risk to their health and safety.

2. Objective

The ANMF (Vic Branch) objective is to support the prevention and management of risks to the health and safety of Victorian nurses, midwives and carers, arising from exposure to heat during the course of their work. This includes nurses, midwives and carers in visiting health services.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all ANMF (Vic Branch) members, and all nurses, midwives and carers eligible for ANMF (Vic Branch) membership in Victorian healthcare environments and other industries.

4. Definitions

Possible effects of exposure to heat:

Heat exhaustion: can be identified by physical and mental fatigue, headaches, nausea and vomiting. Heat exhaustion is mainly caused by loss of bodily fluids through perspiration.

Heat cramps: occurs prior to Heat exhaustion and is caused from a loss of bodily fluids, water and electrolytes, through perspiration. The effect results in cramps in arms, legs and the rest of the body.

Heat Stroke – a life threatening condition that requires immediate first aid and medical attention¹. Heat stroke can overcome a person very quickly and without any warning. The following symptoms can indicate a possible Heat Stroke:

- 4.1 Hot, dry skin
- 4.2 Lack of muscle control
- 4.3 Increased body temperature
- 4.4 Confusion
- 4.5 Stroke-like symptoms

Measuring temperature:

Ordinary dry bulb thermometer (DB) is adequate to measure the temperature in the workplace. This is only adequate when humidity and air movement is not excessive. If using dry bulb thermometer during high humidity and prompt air movement, the reading may be inaccurate. DB thermometer is usually adequate for all indoor facilities.

5. Policy

- 5.1 Under the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, all employees have a right to perform their work in an environment that is safe and without risks to health from exposure

¹ Health Department Victoria – “Staying Healthy in the Heat”, August 2012, WorkSafe Queensland – Working in heat – advice about how to prevent heat illness from working outdoors in hot weather or where heat is generated as part of work, January 2013.

to heat.

5.2 Working in hot conditions can result in severe health effects, including serious illness. Heat can cause the following effects:

- 5.2.1 Physical discomfort
- 5.2.2 Reduced concentration leading to errors
- 5.2.3 Heat exhaustion
- 5.2.4 Fatigue
- 5.2.5 Aggravation of pre-existing illnesses
- 5.2.6 Increase of other workplace hazards
- 5.2.7 Skin rashes
- 5.2.8 Heat cramps
- 5.2.9 Fainting
- 5.2.10 In extreme conditions, can result in potentially fatal heat stroke²

6 Key elements

6.1 Employers

The ANMF (Vic Branch) requires employers to prevent and minimise the risk of exposure to heat through:

6.1.1 Air-conditioned facilities

In air-conditioned facilities it is important to keep the temperature at an optimal range to attempt to accommodate most of the residents/patients and staff. It is important to note that everyone is different and there may be some who disagree with the temperature. The optimal temperature is between 20°C and 26°C³. If a majority of staff request a change in temperature, management must consult and consider this request as per the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004

If the temperature has reached 26°C, ensure that the air-conditioning is functioning appropriately to lower the temperature as soon as possible.

Air movement needs to be maintained at a steady rate (usually between 0.1 and 0.2m/sec) to ensure maximum comfort for the employees⁴. This can generally be controlled by the air-conditioning system.

Natural ventilation, by windows, should be present in all facilities where air movement by the air-conditioning system is inadequate; this can be indicated by the feelings of 'stuffiness'.

The air-conditioning system requires regular servicing and maintaining to ensure that breakdowns do not occur. In case of a breakdown, during hot conditions, please refer to guidelines set for non-air-conditioned facilities.

Air-conditioning systems must be maintained and serviced to manufacturer's requirements to prevent breakdown as per Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 requirements to maintain equipment and the workplace in an appropriate condition.

² WorkSafe Victoria Guidance Note – "Working in Heat", July 2012, page 1

³ WorkSafe Victoria Compliance Code: "Workplace amenities and work environment" (Sept, 2008)

⁴ WorkSafe Victoria Compliance Code: "Workplace amenities and work environment" (Sept 2008)

6.1.2 Non air-conditioned facilities

In facilities where air-conditioning is not available, certain control measures should be implemented to ensure that employee comfort is maximised. The optimal temperature remains between 20°C and 26°C.

Air movement should be assisted / increased by the use of fans and natural ventilation, i.e. open windows. In hot conditions increased air movement assists in maximising comfort.

Employers need to consider the control measures, listed below, to ensure that employees are not exposed to health and safety issues resulting from heat.

6.1.3 Short-term / immediate control measures

- Provide employees with fans
- Employ a work/rest regime
- Provide a work rotation system
- Staff rotation between areas, where some may be cooler
- Portable air-conditioners
- Provide cool water

6.1.4 Medium-term control measures

- Tinting of windows
- Building insulation

6.1.5 Long-term control measures

- Installation of fixed air-conditioning systems

6.1.6 Visiting health services

- Nurses, midwives and carers working in visiting health services are prone to heat hazards, whilst having to travel between visits to sites and also during their visits.

6.1.7 Employers must provide cars that are fitted with air conditioning, to nurses, midwives and carers who are working in visiting health services. The employer must ensure that the vehicles are regularly serviced and maintained to minimise the risk of breakdowns with checks made that the air-conditioning is also working properly, to ensure the comfort of nurses, midwives and carers, whilst working in high temperatures.

6.1.8 Employers should provide the following personal protective equipment to all nurses who work in visiting health services:

- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen

6.1.9 Employers are responsible for ensuring that cooling facilities are adequate, when conducting the initial site inspections, at all visiting sites including client's homes. When nurses, midwives and carers are visiting clients' homes, they may request clients to provide suitable cooling measures for their comfort i.e. air conditioning if available, fans or natural ventilation and cold drinking water.

6.1.10 Nurses, midwives and carers have the right to complete hazard reports, once heat hazards are identified.

6.1.11 Increased paid rest breaks should be made available to staff when working in temperatures that exceed 30° Celsius. Actions should be taken to reduce the temperature, once it reaches 26° Celsius, to ensure that staff are able to work comfortably.

6.1.12 Other responsibilities of employers include:

- To monitor health of employees
- To monitor conditions at a workplace under the employer's management and control (this includes temperature and ventilation)
- To maintain each workplace in a condition that is safe and without risk to health

6.2 Consultation

6.2.1 The participation of and consultation with staff and their representatives, including the ANMF (Vic Branch) and Health & Safety Representatives (HSRs), is critical to the effective implementation of relevant and sustainable policies and procedures and risk control strategies for preventing and managing the risks associated with working in heat.

6.2.2 Appropriate consultative and representative structures (including HSRs and OHS Committees) are necessary so as to encourage staff to report injuries/illness and unresolved issues related to working in heat in the workplace to both management and / or HSRs.

6.3 Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs)

The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports involvement of HSRs in prevention of risks associated with exposure to heat in the workplace:

- Encourage staff to report all incidents related to exposure to heat in the workplace
- Representation and consultation with employers
- Health and Safety Committee (HSC) formulation and participation
- Review and dissemination of plans for prevention of exposure to risks of heat
- Workplace OHS issue resolution
- Provisional Improvement Notices (PINs) or requests for WorkSafe Inspectors to attend the workplace if employers have not acted to resolve risks related to exposure to heat

6.4 ANMF (Vic Branch) members

The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports involvement of members in the prevention of risks associated with working in heat:

- Reporting issues relating to working in heat to management and HSRs
- Consultation through HSRs on measures to control the risks of working in heat

7 Relevant legislation

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007

8 Relevant guidance

- WorkSafe Victoria Compliance Code: "Workplace amenities and work environment" (Sept 2008)
- WorkSafe Victoria Guidance Note: "Working in Heat" (July 2012)
- Trades Hall: OHS Reps at work, Hazards, Heat (Oct, 2009)