

Fact sheet

WORKING IN THE HEAT

With the Australian summer's highest recorded temperature records regularly being broken, it's a timely reminder to be aware of the risks of working in the heat.

Macadamia growers and workers, particularly those who work outdoors, need to be aware of the risks of working in a hot or sunny environment, including exposure to UV radiation. Heat-related illness is a progressive condition and, if left untreated, can be fatal. Heat can cause dehydration, heat rash, heat cramps, fainting, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

This fact sheet is a guide to responsibilities under Work Health and Safety laws and to managing the risks of working in the heat.

Fast facts

Macadamia growers and workers, particularly those who work outdoors, need to be aware of the risks of working in a hot or sunny environment. It is important to make sure everyone knows what their responsibilities are under Work Health and Safety laws to manage the risks of working in the heat.

All orchards should also have completed a risk assessment for working in the heat and developed control measures that everyone is familiar with.

Be aware of the symptoms of heat-related illness, such as dizziness, fainting, rash, cramping and general weakness and ensure that it is treated, either with first aid or by calling an ambulance.

Legal responsibilities

Under Work Health and Safety laws around Australia, property owners, managers and workers all have responsibilities to manage the risks of working in the heat.

Owners and managers must ensure as far as practical that workers and other people, including volunteers and visitors, are not exposed to health and safety risks in the workplace, which includes the orchard. In the case of working in the heat, this means assessing risks and eliminating or minimising them as far as is practical.

Workers also have a responsibility to take "reasonable care" for their own health and safety as well as not



Aim to manage exposure to the sun, particularly in the hottest periods of the day and in young orchards where there is less shade, by providing, where possible, machinery with sheltered or covered cabs and appropriate personal protective equipment.

adversely affecting that of other people. This includes complying with instructions and cooperating with policies and procedures to do with health and safety in the workplace.

This responsibility extends to other people at the workplace, including volunteers and visitors.

Managing the risks

Managing the risks of working in the heat involves the following steps:

1. **Identify the hazard.** Hazards can include air temperature, air flow, humidity, the nature of the work e.g. physical intensity and length of time, how fit and experienced workers are, whether water or electrolyte drinks are close by and the nature of the workplace.
2. **Assess the risk.** When you have identified hazards, go through them and assess how severe the heat risk is for each (impact and potential to cause harm), whether you need to act and how urgently.
3. **Control the risk.** Under duty of care, it is important that everything reasonably practicable is done to eliminate the risks associated with working in the heat (for examples over the page).
4. **Review control measures.** Part of managing the risk is to review your control measures to make sure they are working as they should and don't result in any new hazards in the workplace.

Reducing the risks when working in hot conditions

Some of the things you can do to reduce the risks associated with working outdoors or in hot conditions are:

- provide shelter, where possible, to protect workers from the sun
- reduce the amount of time workers spend in the sun
- manage exposure to the sun, particularly in the hottest periods of the day and in young orchards where there is less shade, and while operating machinery such as harvesters and mowers with an uncovered cab
- try to reschedule work to cooler times of the day, such as early morning or late afternoon
- rotate tasks to lessen a worker's exposure to the sun
- be aware of temperatures in areas that have reduced ventilation, such as nurseries, or lack ceiling insulation, such as sorting sheds
- ensure you and your fellow workers stay hydrated throughout the day and have access to plenty of plain drinking water
- use rest periods so workers can cool down
- provide personal protective equipment such as clothing with UPF 50+ rating, loose shirts with long sleeves, long trousers, hats, sunscreen (SPF 30+) and sunglasses which meet Australian UV protection standards.



Scheduling outdoor tasks to cooler times of the day can help minimise a workers' exposure to the sun and extreme heat often experienced throughout summer months.

Symptoms of heat related illness

Workers exposed to excessive heat are at the most risk of heat related illnesses. Look out for signs of dizziness, general weakness and collapse. In extreme cases people may suffer from heat stroke, which can be fatal. If anyone is showing symptoms of heat stroke, seek immediate medical assistance.

It's important to have a common-sense approach to working in the heat and to monitor temperature, humidity, hydration and level of work activity.

Some common effects of working in the heat include:

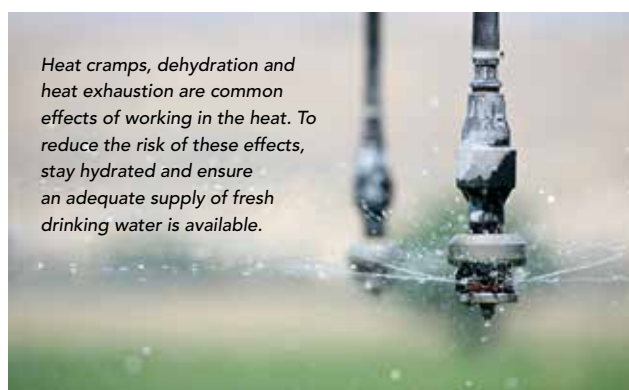
- Heat rash. Skin can become irritated and cause discomfort when working in heat.
- Heat cramps. Muscles can cramp as a result of heavy sweating without replacing salt and electrolytes.
- Fainting. Can occur when workers stand or rise from a sitting position.
- Dehydration. Increased sweating can lead to dehydration if workers aren't drinking enough water.
- Heat exhaustion. Occurs when the body is working too hard to stay cool.
- Heat stroke. Occurs when the body can no longer cool itself. This can be fatal.
- Burns. Can occur if a worker comes into contact with hot surfaces or tools.
- Slips. A worker will sweat more in hot conditions which can increase the risk of slips, e.g. a worker might slip when using sharp tools if their hands are damp.
- Reduced concentration. When working in heat it is more difficult to concentrate and a worker may become confused. This means workers may be more likely to make mistakes, such as forgetting to guard machinery. Reduced concentration can also affect the ability to assess hazards, which may increase the risk of a workplace incident or injury.
- Increased chemical uptake into the body. Heat can cause the body to absorb chemicals differently and can increase the side effects of some medications.

Apart from the obvious causes of heat-related conditions, there are many other factors that may contribute to heat-related problems at work, including:

- conditions which cause dehydration (like vomiting, diarrhoea or alcohol or caffeine consumption)
- individual medical conditions (e.g. heart problems and diabetes)
- medications that affect the body's ability to regulate temperature (e.g. diuretics and antidepressants)
- a person's age and general fitness levels.

Further information

Tool	Reference
Model Code of Practice. How to manage work health and safety risks. Practical guide for people who have duties to manage risks to health and safety under the WHS Act and regulations applying in a jurisdiction.	Safe Work Australia website https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-how-manage-work-health-and-safety-risks
Managing the risks of working in the heat. Practical guide to managing the risks associated with working in the heat and what to do if a worker begins to suffer from a heat-related illness.	Safe Work Australia website www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/guide-managing-risks-working-heat
Heat stress calculator. Can be used to identify risk factors as a way of managing illness related to heat stress.	Queensland Government website https://fswqap.worksafe.qld.gov.au/etools/etool/heat-stress-basic-calculator-test/
Checklist for risk management of heat in the workplace. A list of risks to consider when managing and controlling the risks caused by working in heat.	Safe Work Australia website https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/checklist-risk-managing-heat-workplace
First aid for heat-related illness. A guide to providing first aid to someone suffering a heat-related illness.	Safe Work Australia website https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/first-aid-heat-related-illness
Guide on exposure to solar ultraviolet radiation (UVR). A guide to managing the risks associated with exposure to UVR.	Safe Work Australia website https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/guide-exposure-solar-ultraviolet-radiation-uvr
Sun protection tips. Tips and advice on sun protection in the workplace and understanding UV radiation.	Cancer Council website https://www.cancercouncil.com.au/cancer-prevention/sun-protection/
Bureau of Meteorology Heatwave Service for Australia. Forecasts the location and severity of heatwaves and information on climate zones of Australia, which can help with identifying the likelihood of high temperatures and high humidity.	Bureau of Meteorology website http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/heatwave/



Heat cramps, dehydration and heat exhaustion are common effects of working in the heat. To reduce the risk of these effects, stay hydrated and ensure an adequate supply of fresh drinking water is available.

Free guidance material on working safely in the sun and heat is available from your relevant state agency.

NSW: www.safework.nsw.gov.au or call 13 10 50

Queensland: www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/ or call 1300 362 128

You can download the *Managing the risks of working in the heat* guideline which includes a first aid fact sheet.

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