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US Labor Department launches national outreach campaign to protect workers from heat-related illnesses

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis today will announce, from Anaheim, Calif., a national outreach initiative by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration to educate workers and their employers about the hazards of working outdoors in the heat and steps needed to prevent heat-related illnesses.

“If you’re working outdoors, you’re at risk for heat-related illnesses that can cause serious medical problems and even death,” said Secretary Solis. “But heat illness can be prevented. This Labor Department campaign will reach across the country with a very simple message – water, rest and shade.”

Each year, thousands of outdoor workers experience heat illness, which often manifests as heat exhaustion. If not quickly addressed, heat exhaustion can become heat stroke, which killed more than 30 workers last year.

“As we move into the summer months, it is very important for workers and employers to take the steps necessary to stay safe in extreme heat,” said OSHA Assistant Secretary Dr. David Michaels. “Drinking water often, taking breaks and limiting time in the heat are simple, effective ways to prevent heat illness.”

Heat can be a real danger for workers in jobs ranging from agriculture and landscaping to construction, road repair, airport baggage handling and even car sales.

OSHA has developed heat illness educational materials in English and Spanish, as well as a curriculum to be used for workplace training. Additionally, a new Web page provides information and resources on heat illness – including how to prevent it and what to do in case of an emergency – for workers and employers. The page is available at <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/index.html>.

Federal OSHA has worked closely with the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration to adapt materials from that state’s successful outreach campaign on heat illness for use in this national effort. In addition, OSHA is now partnering with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on weather service alerts that will incorporate worker safety precautions when heat alerts are issued across the U.S. NOAA also will include pertinent worker safety information on its Heat Watch Web page at <http://www.noaawatch.gov/themes/heat.php>.

OSHA will leverage relationships with other state and local partners, employers, trade organizations, unions, community groups, educational institutions and health care professionals to disseminate training materials, and educate workers and employers, on the hazards of working in the heat and how to prevent heat-related illnesses.

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