

Humidex Based Heat Response Plan

What is it?

- The Humidex plan is a simplified way of protecting workers from heat stress which is based on the 2022 ACGIH Heat Stress TLV® (Threshold Limit Value®) which uses wet bulb globe temperatures (WBGT) to estimate heat strain. These WBGT's were translated into Humidex.
- The ACGIH prescribes an action limit (AL) based on the ability of “healthy hydrated unacclimatized workers to sustain thermal equilibrium”. This limit “has a small margin of safety, and some workers may experience heat-related disorders below the AL.”
- **Note:** in the translation process some simplifications and assumptions have been made, therefore, **the plan may not be applicable in workplaces with additional sources of heat and/or humidity** (follow steps #1-5 to ensure the Humidex plan is appropriate for your workplace, if not, follow the ACGIH Heat Stress and Strain TLV®). **This plan assumes moderate, unacclimatized work.**

Adjusted* Humidex	Response
25 – 29	supply water to workers on an “as needed” basis
30 – 33	post Heat Stress Alert notice; encourage workers to drink extra water; start recording hourly temperature and relative humidity
34 – 37	post Heat Stress Warning notice; notify workers that they need to drink extra water; ensure workers are trained to recognize symptoms
38 – 39	work with 15 minutes rest per hour can continue; provide adequate cool (10-15°C) water; at least 1 cup (240 mL) of water every 20 minutes workers with symptoms should seek medical attention
40 – 41	work with 30 minutes rest per hour can continue in addition to the provisions listed previously
42 – 44	if feasible, work with 45 minutes rest per hour can continue in addition to the provisions listed above
45** or over	only medically supervised work can continue

* “adjusted” means adjusted for additional clothing and radiant heat (see steps #4 & #5)

**at Humidex above 45 (29.0°C WBGT), heat stress to be managed as per the ACGIH TLV®

General Controls: General controls apply to all workers and include providing annual heat stress training, encouraging adequate fluid replacement, permitting self-limitation of exposure, encouraging watching out for symptoms in co-workers, and adjusting expectations for workers coming back to work after an absence. Workers doing moderate work are not considered acclimatized in Ontario unless they regularly work around significant heat and/or humidity sources (e.g., in foundries, around ovens, etc.).

Job-Specific Controls: Job-specific controls include (in addition to general controls) engineering controls to reduce physical job demands, shielding of radiant heat, increased air movement, reduction of heat and moisture emissions at the source, adjusting exposure times to allow sufficient recovery, and personal protective equipment that provides for body cooling. Apply the hierarchy of controls.

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Limitations: this table is based on work with **little or no radiant heat**, assuming wearing **regular summer clothing**; if your specific working conditions vary from these assumptions, see the steps 1-5 listed below to make adjustments

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Temp (in °C)	relative humidity (in %)																		Temp (in °C)																						
	100%	95%	90%	85%	80%	75%	70%	65%	60%	55%	50%	45%	40%	35%	30%	25%	20%	15%	10%																						
49																			50	49																					
48																			49	48																					
47	Adjusted* Humidex	Action							NEVER IGNORE ANYONE'S SYMPTOMS DESPITE YOUR MEASUREMENTS!												50	47	47																		
46																																	49	46	46						
45																	45+**	only medically supervised work															50	47	45	45					
44																	42-44	75% rest																49	46	43	44				
43																	40-41	50% rest																	49	47	45	42	43		
42																	38-39	25% rest																		50	48	46	43	41	42
41																	34-37	warning & double water																		48	46	44	42	40	41
40																	30-33	alert & water																		49	47	45	43	41	39
39	25-29	water as needed																			49	47	45	43	41	39	37	39													
38	* “adjusted” means adjusted for additional clothing and radiant heat (see steps 4 & 5)											49	47	45	43	42	40	38	36	38																					
37	** above a humidex of 45 use the ACGIH Heat Stress/Strain TLV											49	47	45	44	42	40	38	37	35	37																				
36									50	49	47	45	44	42	40	39	37	35	34	36																					
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27	41	40	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	25	24		27																					
26	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	25	24			26																					
25	37	36	35	34	33	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	26	25	24				25																					
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22	31	30	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	25	24									22																					
21	29	29	28	27	26	26	25	24	24											21																					
	100%	95%	90%	85%	80%	75%	70%	65%	60%	55%	50%	45%	40%	35%	30%	25%	20%	15%	10%																						
relative humidity (in %)																																									

relative humidity (in %)

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Step #1: Training

- the Humidex plan by itself cannot guarantee that workers will not be affected by heat stress. It is absolutely essential that workers know how to recognize the early signs and symptoms of heat stress and know what to do to prevent them!
- if at all possible, workers need to be able and supported in altering their pace of work, rest breaks, and fluid intake in response to any early symptoms (240 mL or a cup of water every 20 minutes).
- the ideal heat stress response plan would let workers regulate their own pace by "listening to their body" without need for measurements.

Step #2: Select a Measurement Location

- split the workplace into heat stress zones and put a thermal hygrometer in each zone (preferably within 10 m (30') of exposed worker(s)).
- identify a representative location within the zone where measurements can be taken (if you want to base your actions on a single reading, select the highest heat stress zone).

Note: The Humidex Heat Response Plan is **based on workplace measurements not weather station or media reports** (temperatures inside buildings **do not** usually correspond with outdoor temperatures)

Step #3: Measure Workplace Humidex

- a thermal hygrometer (usually \$10-\$50 at hardware or office supply stores) is a simple way to measure the temperature and relative humidity in your workplace.
- once you have the temperature and humidity, use the table above to determine the corresponding Humidex value and the appropriate heat stress prevention response (**remember to adjust for clothing (step #4) and radiant heat (step #5)**)
- measurements should be recorded at least hourly if the Humidex reaches 30° (21°C WBGT).

NEVER IGNORE ANYONE'S SYMPTOMS NO MATTER WHAT THE MEASUREMENT!

Step #4: Adjust for Clothing

- evaporating sweat is the primary way the body gets rid of excess heat build-up; therefore, the best clothing is the kind that makes it easiest for sweat to evaporate. The Humidex plan assumes regular summer clothes (long-sleeved shirt & long pants, underwear, socks and shoes).
- for workers who wear cotton overalls on top of summer clothes one should add 5-6° Humidex (roughly equal to 3°C WBGT) to the workplace Humidex measurement.
- for different clothing configurations, estimate the clothing adjustment value by comparing them with cotton overalls (e.g., gloves, hard hat, apron, protective sleeves might be equivalent to a little less than half the evaporation resistance as overalls so add 1° or 2° Humidex).
- if clothes do not allow sweat evaporation (encapsulated suits) heat stress should be managed by monitoring vital signs (see ACGIH TLV®)

Step #5: Adjust for Radiant Heat

- for outdoor work **in direct sunlight** between the hours of 10 am and 5 pm, add 3-4° Humidex units (pro-rate according to percentage cloud cover and/or shade) to your Humidex measurement.
- for **indoor radiant heat exposures**, use common sense to judge whether the exposure of concern involves more or less radiant heat than direct sunlight and adjust the Humidex measurement by adding the appropriate proportion of the 3-4° Humidex units adjustment factor.

Health Effects of Heat Stress*

Health Effect	Symptoms	Treatment
Heat Rash	Bumps on skin with severe itching caused by hot humid environments and plugged sweat glands.	Change into dry clothes often and avoid hot environments. Rinse skin with cool water. Wash regularly to keep skin clean and dry.
Fainting (Syncope)	Sudden fainting after at least two hours of work; cool moist skin; weak pulse.	GET MEDICAL ATTENTION. Move to a cool area; loosen clothing; lie down; if awake, sip some cool water.
Heat Cramps	Heat cramps are painful, involuntary muscle spasms that usually occur during heavy exercise in hot environments. Inadequate fluid intake often contributes to this problem. The spasms may be more intense and more prolonged than typical nocturnal leg cramps. Muscles most often affected include the calves, arms, abdomen, and back – although the cramps may involve any muscle group involved in the exercise.	If you suspect heat cramps: Rest briefly and cool down. Drink water or an electrolyte-containing sports drink. Practice gentle, range-of-motion stretching and gentle massage of the affected muscle group. If the cramps are severe or don't go away after drinking a beverage with electrolytes, get medical help right away.
Heat Exhaustion	Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion often begin suddenly, sometimes after excessive exercise, perspiration and inadequate fluid intake. Features resemble shock and include: feeling faint, nausea, ashen appearance, rapid heartbeat, low blood pressure, hot, dry or sweaty skin, low-grade fever, generally less than 40°C.	If you suspect heat exhaustion: Get the person out of the sun and into a shady or an air-conditioned location. Lay the person down and elevate the feet slightly. Loosen or remove the individual's clothing. Have the person drink cold water, not iced, or a sports drink containing electrolytes. Cool the person by spraying him or her with cool water and fanning. Monitor the person carefully. Heat exhaustion can quickly become heatstroke. If fever — especially greater than 40°C — fainting, confusion or seizures may occur, CALL FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANCE.
Heat Stroke	The main sign of heatstroke is a markedly elevated temperature — generally greater than 40°C — with hot, dry skin and changes in mental status ranging from personality changes to confusion and coma. Other signs may include: rapid heartbeat, rapid and shallow breathing, elevated or lowered blood pressure, cessation of sweating, irritability, confusion or unconsciousness, fainting, which can be the first sign in older adults.	If you suspect heatstroke: Move the person out of the sun and into a shady or an air-conditioned space. Dial 911 or CALL FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANCE. Cool the person by covering him or her with damp sheets or by spraying with cool water. Direct air onto the person with a fan or newspaper.

* The items regarding heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke are copyright Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All Rights reserved. Used with permission from www.mayoclinic.org. Heat Rash and Fainting adapted from Ontario Ministry of Labour Heat Stress Guideline: http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/gl_heat.php (accessed Jan/21 & Nov/23).

Vulnerability to Heat Stress: There are many permanent or temporary conditions (e.g., age, heart or lung conditions, dehydration, fatigue, some medications, etc.) that can make a person more vulnerable to heat strain. Despite these conditions, workers may be able to cope given adequate knowledge of the signs and symptoms of heat stress and, given the latitude to make the appropriate adjustments to their pace of work. It is more often the young, fit workers who may think they are invincible who succumb to heat strain. Some workers may need medical advice about what accommodations they might need.

****Acclimatization & Metabolic Rate:** In the past the MOL heat stress guideline stated that "hot spells in Ontario seldom last long enough for workers to acclimatize". Workers performing "moderate" work (e.g., work with some pushing, lifting) would also not be assumed to be acclimatized by the same criteria, unless there is significant radiant heat associated with the work. Since the TLV® is based on data derived from 20-year-old males weighing an average of 154 lbs., "real" workers probably burn up more calories than the TLV® light category assumes. Selecting the "moderate" work category will account to some extent for workers who are somewhat dehydrated, older (e.g., over 40), not male, are heavier than 154 lbs and perhaps have additional risk factors compromising their heat stress response.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this document.
OHCOW assumes no responsibility for how the information is used.