

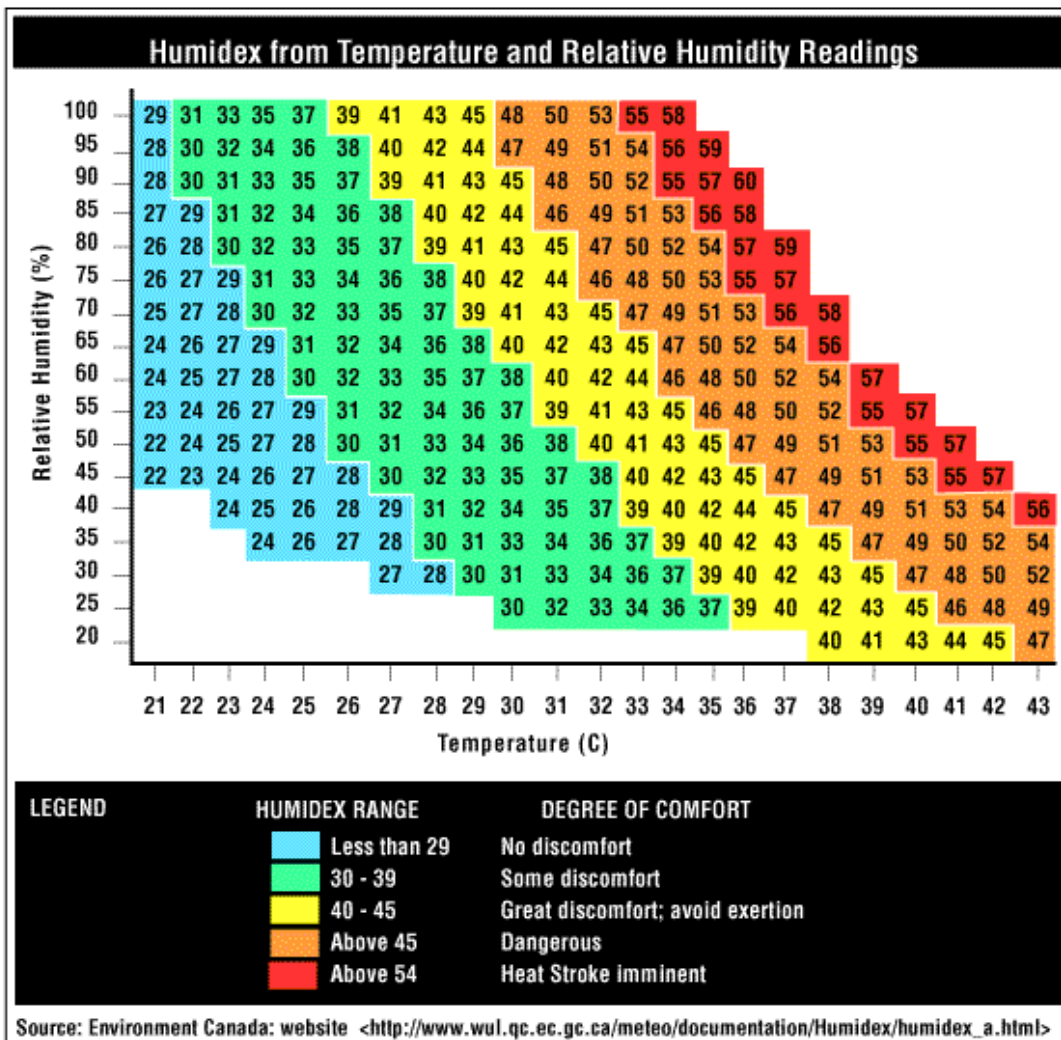
HEAT ALERT – Outdoors Workers

Over the final week of June and first week of July, we are expecting record-breaking heat across all of British Columbia. This will bring increased probability of forest fires, and a very-serious risk of heat stroke and heat exhaustion for outdoor workers, including tree planters. Outdoor work such as tree planting is very strenuous, and risk of heat stroke and heat exhaustion is high. Heat stroke can be fatal and must be taken very seriously. These conditions are HIGHLY UNUSUAL, and employers should be treating this heat spell as a serious event.

Section 7.29 of the OSHR requires a heat stress assessment and exposure control plan whenever workers face conditions that could cause heat stress or elevate core body temperature above 38° Celsius. Temperatures are forecasted into the high 30's and even 40's across most of the province, meaning that almost all employers need to be looking at taking additional steps toward protecting their staff from the heat.

Conditions will vary across locations, so monitoring local conditions will be important. WorkSafeBC requires employers to NOT expose workers to levels of heat stress outlined in the ACGIH Standard which is calculated according to WBGT (wet bulb global temperature). Link here: https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/phys_agents/heat_control.html

The ACHIG standard sets a limit to the amount of strenuous activity workers can be asked to perform over a given period of work. However, calculating WBGT requires sensitive instruments. Another helpful guideline to deciding when to limit work is the **humidex chart** (temperature and humidity) provided by Environment Canada. Forecasts indicate much of BC may enter the yellow and orange areas of the chart where exertion may be dangerous and should be limited.



In considering what steps to take to protect workers, employers should **start immediately by reviewing the hazards of extreme heat with ALL staff and ensuring that all employees** (including first aid) can identify and distinguish between heat exhaustion and heat stroke and are aware of both preventive steps and how to assist workers that are impacted by heat exposure.

Additional steps may include:

- Scheduling days off for the hottest days, when temperature and humidex are expected to be in the highest range. It may be necessary to consult with clients and Prime Contractors to support these changes.
- Reducing hours of work in order to reduce exposure to heat.
- Adapt to fire-hours with earlier starts and finishes to avoid work in the hottest parts of the days. Companies adapting to fire hours should seek to make changes gradually over several days and as-soon-as-possible to help workers adapt their sleeping schedules. Fatigue and impaired capacity can result if workers have to change sleep patterns abruptly or do not get enough rest.
- Ensure supervisors monitor workers constantly for signs of heat stress, and verify workers are taking proper steps to hydrate and reduce exposure.
- Ensure first aid attendants have the means to provide cooling and other assistance to workers that may be affected by heat stress. Ask that they review these practices prior to work.
- Educate workers about strategies for reducing sun-exposure, including use of sunscreen, wide-brimmed hats, loose cool clothing, and taking breaks in the shade.
- Encourage proper hydration, and ensure workers have access to electrolyte powders or other salt-sugar mixtures to help them absorb water.
- Instruct workers to monitor each other, and educate them about potential signs of heat stroke, including sudden changes in behavior, confusion, headaches, nausea, and lethargy.
- Provide workers with cool drinking water at the worksite, including all field worksites.
- Provide cooling stations, with reflective tarps, misting devices, ice-packs, cold drinks, air-conditioning (even inside trucks), to help workers control their body temperatures. Cooling stations should be considered for both field and camp-based locations.
- Encourage or enforce breaks to ensure workers properly manage their exposure and heat stress.
- Ensure worker accommodations are suitably serviced to permit adequate rest and cooling. In tent camps, provision of additional shade tents and silvicool tarps can assist in providing cooler sleeping conditions.

Alert provided by Jordan Tesluk

BC Safe Forestry Project