

Work/Rest Schedules in High Temperatures



Work/rest cycles are critical in preventing heat-related illnesses among workers exposed to high temperatures. Having a schedule that allows enough time for workers to cool down and recover between periods of physical work can reduce the risk of heat stress.

A work/rest cycle is a pattern of alternating work and rest based on assessment of risk. The proportions of work and rest will vary, as more and longer periods of rest/recovery are necessary as risks increase.

Continuous Work (100% of work in a work/rest cycle)

When working in a hot environment, the work/rest cycle will be based on factors like ambient temperature, radiant heat sources, degree of physics exertion, required clothing, and the acclimatization of the worker.

Light Work:
Operating Equipment
Walking on flat, level ground

Moderate Work:
Using hand tools for short periods of time
Carrying objects under 40 lbs

Heavy Work:
Using hand tools for extended periods
Carrying objects over 40 lbs
Climbing a ladder/stairs

In general, for a worker, acclimatized to the heat, wearing normal clothing and working in in the shade in normal humidity levels

Temperature	Heat Stress Risk	Light Work	Moderate Work	Heavy Work
< 26°C	Little to no risk	Continuous	Continuous	50/10
27 - 28 °C	Low risk	Continuous	50/10	40/20
29 - 30 °C	Moderate	Continuous	40/20	30/30
31 - 32°C	High	Continuous	30/30	20/40
> 32°C	Extreme	50/10	20/40	10/50

In extreme heat, a work/rest schedule may not eliminate the risk of heat illness! If you notice symptoms of heat-related illness in yourself or others, stop working and get yourself (or the affected worker(s)) to a cooler environment and alert first aid if necessary.

If the humidity is: 40% add 2 °C, 50% - add 3°C, 60% or more: add 5°C

If wearing protective or heavy clothing, the heat stress risk increases significantly.

Example: a worker is pushing a lawnmower outside in overcast weather. the air temperature is 27°C, and the humidity is at 40%. Accounting for the sun and the humidity increases the temperature by 7°C and takes the activity from a task with little to no risk for heat stress with a 50/ 10 work rest schedule to one with an extreme risk for heat stress and a 20/40 work/rest schedule.