



ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF WORKPLACE HEAT SAFEGUARDS

Talking points to convince decision makers to protect workers from extreme heat.

Employers in the United States have a legal and moral imperative to protect the lives and well-being of their workers by providing safe and healthy working conditions. Commonsense protections such as water, rest, shade, training, and first aid procedures are crucial for meeting this central obligation to heat-exposed workers.

Heat protections aren't just the right thing to do, they're the financially smart thing to do. Establishing heat-safe workplaces and practices can improve employee productivity and morale and reduce preventable costs to employers. Ultimately, the benefits of workplace heat protections outweigh the costs of implementation.

TOPLINE MESSAGES

- Employers and the economy win when heat safeguards help employees achieve their full potential over their working lifetime.
- Well-rested and hydrated workers are more productive and make fewer mistakes than overheated ones.
- Heat-related harms to workers impose preventable financial, time, and reputational costs on employers.

GO DEEPER

STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMY

- The tragedy of a worker being killed or debilitated by heat is compounded when that person is a household's primary wage earner. Significant losses in household income can lead to ripple effects in communities and the [overall economy](#).
- The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) estimates that complying with its proposed workplace heat standard could cost covered establishments a total of about [\\$7.8 billion per year](#), or about [0.04 percent](#) of average annual revenue. This cost estimate is probably on the high side because OSHA didn't consider one-time investments such as air conditioning that could reduce other future compliance costs. On the other hand, avoiding heat-related deaths and illnesses could result in nearly [\\$9.2 billion in benefits](#) per year. This benefit estimate is [on the low side](#) because it doesn't include benefits such as avoiding health conditions that are indirectly related to heat (e.g., injuries), or [reducing employee turnover](#).

INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

- Heat-related illnesses and injuries can keep workers away from work for hours to weeks at a time. For example:
 - » From 2011 to 2022, heat-related illnesses forced [3,740 U.S. workers](#) to miss 11 days or more of work each. 1,500 of those workers missed a month or more each.
 - » A study of more than 480,000 workplace accidents in the Italian manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors suggests that a 3.6 °F increase in daily average temperatures (from 2014 levels) would result in nearly [232,000 lost work days](#) because of work-related injuries.
- Preventing even mild heat stress can improve the [physical and mental capacity](#) of workers, not to mention their motivation to maintain a high level of effort. For example:
 - » A multi-national study of 376 experienced manual workers found that during shifts without planned breaks, the amount of work time lost increased with every 1.8 °F (1 °C) above 64 °F. In very hot conditions (104 °F), workers [lost an average of 3.4 hours](#) of an 8-hour shift.
 - » Multiple studies have shown that workers will work less efficiently when they're too hot. OSHA estimates that its proposed break schedule for high heat conditions (heat index of >90 °F) will reduce pacing-related losses of productivity by an [average of 32 minutes](#) over an 8-hour shift at establishments that currently do not provide any breaks.
- Providing workers with adequate rest, water, and shade can increase their productivity and reduce their likelihood of [costly mistakes](#), even if they end up working fewer hours overall. For example, a rest-shade-hydration protocol at a large Nicaraguan sugarcane mill increased the productivity of burned cane cutters by [nine percent](#) from 2017 to 2022, even though those workers went from an average of 8-hour workdays to 4.7-hour workdays.
- Heat-related labor disruptions are becoming more common. In just the past two years, scorching temperatures across the country have pushed workers from a wide range of industries—including fast food, retail, agriculture, and logistics—[to walk off the job](#).

AVOIDING PREVENTABLE COSTS

- Keeping workers safe from heat can reduce workers' compensation costs. For example:
 - » According to an analysis of workers compensation data from 24 U.S. states, most of which don't have heat standards, claims for injuries from any cause [increased up to six percent](#) on days with a high temperature of 75 °F or more, compared to days that hit 65 to 70 °F.
 - » An Australian study using 35 years of workers' compensation data found the number of claims [increased by 0.24 percent](#) for every 1.8 °F increase in daytime high temperatures.
 - » Studies of municipal workers in Texas found a [reduction in heat-related claims](#) after multi-pronged safeguards such as acclimatization of workers and first aid protocols were put in place.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that workers in some industries and labor markets are more likely to leave uncomfortably or dangerously hot jobs, resulting in [high turnover costs](#) for employers. For example:
 - » In 2024, a migrant farmworker [left his employer](#) in North Carolina after being sickened by the heat and then being berated by his crew supervisor for taking a break, even though his resignation forced him to return to his home country of Mexico and threatened his chances of securing future farmwork in the United States.
 - » According to *The New York Times*, 10 percent more workers than usual [quit their jobs](#) at a meatpacking plant in Kansas during the brutally hot summer of 2023.
 - » An Oregon-based worker talked to *The Washington Post* about leaving his warehousing job after regularly being exposed to temperatures of 100 °F and what he called "really gross '[survival of the fittest](#)'" conditions year after year.