Working in heat: what drivers and yard staff should do

Fatigue and work diary - checked 7 Nov 2026

Drink water before you feel thirsty, take breaks somewhere cool, do the heavy work early in the day and keep an eye on each other. Heat makes you tired and slow, just like fatigue. If someone is confused, collapses or stops sweating, it could be heat stroke - call 000 straight away.

Why it matters

Heat does the same thing to you as fatigue. You get tired, your reactions slow down and you make poor decisions - behind the wheel, on a forklift or up on a trailer deck.

This summer is shaping up hot. The Bureau of Meteorology says temperatures are very likely to be above average across most of Australia from November to January, with a very high chance of unusually warm nights and a higher risk of heatwaves. Hot nights mean poor sleep, so people start the next shift already tired.

Where the heat gets you

Who	Where the risk is
Drivers	Tarping, strapping and loading in the sun. Waiting at sites. Fuelling. Breakdowns on the side of the road. A cab with no working air-conditioning.
Yard staff	Sun bouncing off concrete and metal decks. Loading, washing and workshop jobs. Hot forklifts and plant. Heavy lifting.
Everyone	High humidity and no breeze. Hard physical work. Heavy clothing or PPE.

Some people are at higher risk: anyone new to the job or back from leave (they haven't got used to the heat yet), anyone unwell or on medicines that affect fluids, workers aged 25 or under or 55 or over, and anyone who has had a heat illness before.

Warning signs

- Feeling hot, weak, dizzy or very tired
- Headache, feeling sick or vomiting
- Cramps
- Very thirsty, or dark yellow urine
- Clumsy, slow, irritable or not thinking straight

Heat stroke is an emergency

Call 000 straight away if someone is confused, has slurred speech, collapses, has a seizure, or stops sweating and has hot skin. Heat stroke can kill.

Drivers - what to do

- Start the shift well hydrated, and carry more water than you think you need - enough to last a breakdown.
- Sip water often. Don't wait until you're thirsty. Go easy on energy drinks, soft drinks and coffee.
- Check the air-conditioning at your daily check. If it isn't working, report it as a fault.
- Do tarping, strapping and loading in the shade or early in the day where you can. Wear gloves - straps, chains and decks get very hot.
- Take your breaks somewhere cool - a shaded rest area or the cab with the air-conditioning on.
- Feeling unwell? Don't drive. Pull over safely, cool down and call your boss.
- Working remote? Tell someone your route, keep your phone charged, and carry a hat and extra water.
- Never leave anyone - or a dog - in a closed vehicle.

Yard staff - what to do

- Do the heavy jobs early in the morning or late in the day.
- Use the forklift, crane or a trolley instead of lifting by hand.
- Take regular breaks in a cool, shaded area, and drink small amounts of water often.
- Swap between hot jobs and cooler jobs.
- Work in pairs and check on each other - people often don't notice their own warning signs.
- Wear loose, light, long-sleeved clothing, a hat and sunscreen.
- Let plant and tools cool down before you handle them.
- Ease new starters and people back from leave into hot work.

If someone is affected

1. Stop work

Get them out of the sun to a cool spot with air flow - shade, an air-conditioned cab or the lunchroom.

2. Loosen clothing

Take off any PPE or heavy clothing they don't need.

3. Cool them down

Wet their skin, fan them, and put cold packs on the neck, armpits and groin.

4. Give water

Small sips of cool water - only if they are fully awake.

5. Call 000

If you see heat stroke signs, or they don't get better quickly. Stay with them until help arrives.

What the boss should do

- Check the Bureau of Meteorology heatwave warnings and plan the week around them.
- Move heavy jobs to cooler times of the day where you can.
- Make sure there is cool water and a cool place to rest, in the yard and in every truck.
- Check on drivers working alone during hot spells.
- Add heat to your risk register, with the controls you will use, and check them during heatwaves.
- Make sure first aid kits and your emergency plan cover heat illness.

Ask the group

- Which jobs here are the hottest, and could we do them at a different time?
- Is the air-conditioning working in every truck?
- Where can you cool down on a break - in the yard and on the road?
- What would you do if a workmate started acting confused on a hot day?

General information, not legal or medical advice.

Sources

Safe Work Australia - Managing the risks of working in heat - https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/Guide%20for%20managing%20the%20risks%20of%20working%20in%20heat.pdf

SafeWork NSW - Heat-related illness - https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/hazards-a-z/working-in-extreme-heat/content-page-blocks/heat-related-illness

Bureau of Meteorology - Long-range forecast November 2026 to January 2027 - https://www.bom.gov.au/video/long-range-forecast-november-2026-to-january-2027