

1. Purpose

To describe the process of identification and control of risks associated with OHS Working in Extreme Weather Conditions Procedure at the Greater Dandenong City Council (GDCC).

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all employees, contractors and volunteers at GDCC workplaces.

3. Definitions

Competent person: A person who has acquired through training, qualifications or experience the knowledge, skills and ability to carry out the task, in a safe manner meeting organisational expectations.

Extreme Weather: Any temperature, whether hot or cold, which has the potential to have an adverse effect on a person's health and safety. Also, weather conditions such as heavy rain, lightning, hail, and strong winds can pose high risks to person's health and safety.

Hazard: A source or a situation with a potential for harm in terms of injury or illness, damage to property, damage to the environment or a combination of these.

Health and Safety Representative (HSR): An employee elected by the DWG to represent them on matters relating to OHS.

Risk Assessment: the process of determining the likelihood and consequence of injury, disease or illness, or damage arising from exposure to a hazard. If there are existing Risk Controls already in place, an Assessment of Risk considers the reliability and robustness of these existing Risk Controls when determining the Inherent and Residual Risk Level/Score.

Safe Operating Procedure (SOP): A document that provides step by step guidance for workers completing a specified task so that health and safety is maintained.

SOPs state what the potential hazards are and the precautions that need to be taken.

Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS): A document that identifies work that is high risk construction work, states the hazards and risks to health and safety of that work, describes the measures to control those risks and describes the manner in which the risk control measures are to be implemented.

4. Responsibilities

For general OHS responsibilities refer to the GDCC OHS Responsibility Procedure. Manager OHS is responsible for:

- ensuring the Procedure is implemented and reviewed, as required.

Managers are responsible for:

- implementing the procedure in their area of responsibility and incorporating it into local procedures and / or other safe work instructions
- ensuring persons comply with extreme heat or cold control requirements

5. Procedure

5.1 Identification of Extreme Weather Hazards

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Some areas of Council and their staff will experience working in extreme weather conditions such as rain, hail, wind / dust storms, thunderstorm asthma, smoke from bushfires, lightning and hot and cold environments. Staff exposed to these conditions may face situations which pose special hazards to health and safety.

Management, in consultation with the HSR of the affected work group, shall determine an agreed approach to identifying and controlling the exposure to the extreme weather condition. This can be done verbally or by including these potential hazards in work instructions, using the OHS Risk and Change Management Procedure as a guide.

Working in air pollution (poor air quality, including conditions for thunderstorm asthma)

If you work outside, you're at risk of exposure to air pollution.

Check the air quality index to determine the air quality where you're working (EPA AirWatch - <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/EPAAirWatch>). If you have an air pollution sensitivity, particularly if combined with an underlying medical condition, you should advise your workplace and follow the advice of your GP or specialist physician.

Events such as dust storms, thunderstorm asthma, and bushfires may temporarily reduce outdoor air quality and pose health and safety risks to workers. Thunderstorm asthma is triggered by a combination of high amounts of grass pollen in the air and certain thunderstorm conditions. Those most at risk are staff who are sensitive to grass pollen and have seasonal hay fever (with or without diagnosed asthma).

Dust and smoke may:

- reduce air quality and impact visibility (particularly dangerous when driving vehicles)
- settle onto equipment and impact the functioning of plant and grip of surfaces, and
- irritate the nose and eyes.
- may cause coughing, shortness of breath and respiratory irritation, as some particles are small enough to get into the throat and lungs. Conditions such as asthma, heart or lung conditions may be worsened by exposure.

Management must put measures in place to manage the risks to health and safety caused by working outdoors when air quality is reduced, including:

- working indoors (where possible)
- rescheduling outdoor work until conditions (e.g. visibility and air quality) improve
- ensuring plant is functioning correctly and has not been affected by dust or debris
- cleaning any dust and debris off outdoor surfaces, and
- providing personal protective equipment such as eye protection and correctly fitted, P2 rated face masks.
- asking staff who have been diagnosed as "at risk" to thunderstorm asthma if they have developed a personalised action plan or hayfever treatment plan with their doctor.

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For valuable guidance on appropriate control measures in these conditions, managers are advised to refer to WorkSafe Victoria's website: 'Health risks of outdoor work in areas impacted by bushfire smoke' - <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/health-risks-outdoor-work-areas-impacted-bushfire-smoke>

Local procedures may include restrictions on taking clients out when air quality is poor.

Working in extreme temperature conditions

Exposure to extreme temperature conditions can lead to the onset of thermal stress. If the condition is left unchecked or not properly managed, it could lead to a more serious condition known as heat or cold strain. It is known that even mild cases of heat and cold strain can lead to a decrease in performance in the workplace, leading to a probability of an accident occurring.

Seven environmental factors affect the amount of stress a worker faces,

1. Temperature,
2. Humidity,
3. Radiant heat (such as from the sun)
4. Air velocity
5. Workplace environment e.g. client homes, working outdoors
6. Airbourne particles e.g dust, pollens
7. Airbourne debris

There are also personal factors that impact upon the level of stress an individual may experience in these conditions, such as;

- Age
- Weight
- Fitness
- Medical condition
- Illnesses
- Medication, and
- Acclimatization
- High work rates or very demanding physical work

HEAT STRESS

There is a clear distinction between heat stress, heat strain and thermal comfort.

Heat Stress is the total heat load; that is, the result of activity and environmental condition.

Heat Strain occurs when the core body temperature rises above 38°C, as a result of heat stress.

Thermal Comfort arises from an individual's perception of the environment; that is, does the body feel hot or cold. The range of environmental conditions which are thermally acceptable to the individual fall within quite narrow limits, and feeling uncomfortably hot does not mean that adverse effects will occur.

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The adverse effects of heat stress or strain range from that of discomfort through to heat stroke which is a life threatening situation.

Hot weather lasting in excess of 2 days can increase the number of cases of heat illness. This is often due to several factors including progressive fluid deficit, loss of appetite (and possible salt depletion) and not enough rest or sleep. Sufficient sleep, good nutrition and appropriate preventative programs is essential in times of prolonged heat stress.

COLD STRAIN

A fall of core temperature below approximately 36°C may induce 'cold strain' (or hypothermia) in a person. Symptoms range from severe and uncontrollable shivering to frost bite and eventually loss of consciousness as the core temperature lowers.

Factors that may increase the risk of cold strain are;

- Wet clothing
- Cold wind
- Immersion in water
- Low air temperatures

5.2 Control of Extreme Heat or Cold Risks

Management shall control all situations where there is a potential for extreme weather conditions on employees under their control by Elimination, Substitution, Engineering Controls, Administrative Controls and finally Personal Protective Equipment & Clothing. ***Monitoring the Bureau of Meteorology website <http://www.bom.gov.au/> will assist in planning and determining what actions need to be taken to protect staff from extreme weather conditions.***

A risk assessment of the task and the conditions using the OHS Risk and Change Management Procedure will help to determine the control measures selected.

ELIMINATION	The extreme weather condition cannot be eliminated
SUBSTITUTION	The extreme weather condition cannot be substituted. However, scheduled time for works can be substituted for other parts of the day Eg from middle of the day to early morning or late afternoon
ENGINEERING	<i>Example, if practicable to do so</i> • Provide shelter sheds or reflective shields to prevent inclement weather or radiant heat. • Provide fans or portable cooling/heating systems.

ADMINISTRATIVE	<i>Example, if practicable to do so</i> • Provide a fresh supply of cool water near the work site • Update weather alerts to staff via SMS or other communication methods • Encourage regular drinking breaks every 15-20 minutes • Encourage regular rest breaks, and observe personnel for any signs of physical discomfort or misjudgement in their performance. • Removal of group or individual from the task when extreme conditions are encountered until conditions are within acceptable limits. • Plan tasks or workloads around weather forecasts e.g substitute a forecasted extremely hot or cold day with a more comfortable temperature and humidity forecasted day or time of day. • Consider less strenuous tasks during periods of extreme heat. • Include controls to extreme weather conditions in work instructions. • Cease work and immediately contact supervisor if your health & wellbeing is at risk
PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT	Including, but not limited to • Providing appropriate clothing, hats, sun screen, wet weather gear etc depending on the extreme of temperature or condition.

6. References

Occupational Health & Safety Act 2004

WorkSafe Victoria

Bureau of Meteorology

EPA AirWatch

Vic Emergency App

7. Related Documents

CGD OHS Policy

OHS Communication & Consultation Operational Procedure

OHS Issue Resolution Operational Procedure

OHS Personal Protective Equipment Procedure

OHS Responsibility Procedure

OHS Risk and Change Management Procedure

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OHS UV Radiation Protection for Outdoor Workers Procedure

8. Document History

Version Number	Issue Date	Description of Change
0.1		1 st Draft from MAV/JLT
0.2	05.12.2019	Accepted by OHS Policy Sub-Committee
0.3	12.03.2020	2 nd Draft Accepted by OHS Policy Sub-Committee
0.4	18.05.2020	14 Day Employee Consultation
1.0	May 2020	OHS Oversight Team Approval
1.1	Jan 2021	Minor change: including thunderstorm asthma into the list of extreme weather conditions accepted by OHS Policy Sub-Committee and approved by OHS Oversight Team
1.2	April 2025	3 rd Draft from OHS Unit
1.3	April 2025	3 rd Draft Accepted by OHS Policy Sub-Committee
1.4	May 2025	14 Day Employee Consultation completed
2.0	May 2025	Approved by OHS Committee