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July 15, 2021

Dear Members,

Re: Heat Stress

BC has been hit with excruciatingly high temperatures and we continue to get hit with rising heat, and the summer is far from over.

It is imperative that we as paramedics understand our responsibility to work safety as well as the responsibility of the Employer to evaluate and develop an effective safety plan (strategy) to support its workers health and safety in heat stressed conditions.

As Paramedics we know the pathophysiology to heat related stress and injury and we are also aware that our personal health and medications directly affect how we tolerate heat related exposures. In an effort to maintain the ever-mounting call volumes with less paramedics to man cars we often ignore our own warning signs as we attempt to support our patients and take that next call. But it is imperative that we understand what WSBC requires of us and our Employer regarding heat stress.

Section 7.29(1)(a) of the OHS Regulation:

- (1) If a worker is or may be exposed to the conditions specified in **section 7.27**, the Employer must conduct a heat stress assessment to determine the potential for hazardous exposure of workers, using measures and methods that are acceptable to the Board, and . . .

Section 7.27 under division 4 Thermal Exposures

- (a) A worker is or may be exposed to thermal conditions that can cause heat stress
- (b) Thermal conditions that could result in worker core temp > 38C
- (c) Thermal condition in excess of ACGIH standards

Section 7.30 Heat stress controls

- (1) If a worker is or may be exposed to the conditions specified in section 7.27, the Employer must implement engineering controls to reduce the exposure of workers to levels below those listed in the screening criteria for heat stress exposure in the heat stress and strain section of the ACGIH Standard.
- (2) If the action described in subsection (1) is not practicable, the Employer must reduce the exposure of workers to levels below those listed in the screening criteria for heat stress exposure in the heat stress and strain section of the ACGIH Standard by providing
 - (a) administrative controls, including a work-rest cycle, acceptable to the Board, or
 - (b) personal protective equipment, if the equipment provides protection equally effective as administrative controls.

Section 7.31 Provision of water

If a worker is or may be exposed to the conditions specified in section 7.27, the Employer must **provide and maintain an adequate supply of cool potable water** close to the work area for the use of a heat exposed worker.

Section 7.32 Removal from and treatment for heat exposure

If a worker shows signs or reports symptoms of heat stress or strain, the worker must be removed from the hot environment and treated by an appropriate first aid attendant, if available, or by a physician.

I have been getting numerous reports that older ambulance units (i.e., 63200 series) don't tolerate the warm temperatures and are often operating with patient compartments between 36-40 Celsius. I understand the tremendous pride that our paramedics have in supporting our communities but the health and wellness of the paramedics in this province must come first. If we don't take care of ourselves, we won't be there to support the communities that we try so hard to support.

*In our current BCEHS EXPOSURE CONTROL PLAN (Part 1) - Protecting Workers from Environmental Hazards (P26) and in our High-Risk Hazards (P36) it identifies under **Engineering Controls**: The ambulance serves as a shelter during the majority of calls. All ambulances are equipped with air conditioning and can be kept relatively cool during hot conditions. Ambulances (and other emergency vehicles on scene) can also be placed when practicable to provide some shade from radiant heat.*

We know that in reality new ambulance models have climate control systems that work but that regrettably our service still has numerous units that struggle to meet operational needs to put it kindly. The lack of newer model units doesn't mitigate the Employer's responsibility to support its workers in Heat Exposure situations. Just as EMALB governs your licence, WSBC governs your Health and Wellness and within that governing body we are under obligation to identify hazards and remove and report the hazards if possible. But there will be cases when an Employee can't remove the hazard and it will require support from a Manager to fix the problem. This is where your Right to Refuse Unsafe Work comes in (3.12) WSBC Regulations.

Any paramedic that is experiencing issues in their ambulance that creates an unsafe situation for the Employees or patients have the right to tag out that unit, report that tag out to their Manager, and Refuse Unsafe Work (3.12) until a safety strategy can be identified. From that point it is the responsibility of the Managers to investigate the safety issues and escalate as defined in the WSBC Regulations as provided below.

3.12 Procedure for refusal

- (1) A person must not carry out or cause to be carried out any work process or operate or cause to be operated any tool, appliance or equipment if that person has reasonable cause to believe that to do so would create an undue hazard to the health and safety of any person.
- (2) A worker who refuses to carry out a work process or operate a tool, appliance or equipment pursuant to subsection (1) must immediately report the circumstances of the unsafe condition to his or her Supervisor or Employer.
- (3) A Supervisor or Employer receiving a report made under subsection (2) must immediately investigate the matter and
 - (a) Ensure that any unsafe condition is remedied without delay, or
 - (b) If in his or her opinion the report is not valid, must so inform the person who made the report.
- (4) If the procedure under subsection (3) does not resolve the matter and the worker continues to refuse to carry out the work process or operate the tool, appliance or equipment, the Supervisor or Employer must investigate the matter in the presence of the worker who made the report and in the presence of



- (a) a worker member of the joint committee,
- (b) a worker who is selected by a trade Union representing the worker, or
- (c) if there is no joint committee or the worker is not represented by a trade Union, any other reasonably available worker selected by the worker.
- (5) If the investigation under subsection (4) does not resolve the matter and the worker continues to refuse to carry out the work process or operate the tool, appliance or equipment, both the Supervisor, or the Employer, and the worker must immediately notify an officer, who must investigate the matter without undue delay and issue whatever orders are deemed necessary.

It is the responsibility of both workers and the Employer to work together to identify unsafe situations and remove the hazard. It is the obligation of our workers (paramedics) to refuse any work that harms you, your partner, and or your patient. It is all our responsibility to identify those hazards and report.

BC Paramedics are to be commended for enduring the relentless challenges of 2000-2021. You have managed through overwhelming challenges. The Opioid epidemic, COVID and its PPE requirements, and now off the chart temperatures. Our paramedics prove that they are world leaders and continue to maintain an unmistakable pride to the job we all love.

As your Provincial Safety Director, I want to thank our members for working safely, and continuing to report unsafe working conditions. If you are in need of support, please don't hesitate to connect with me and report.

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