



INDOOR AND OUTDOOR WORKER PROTECTIONS DURING EXTREME TEMPERATURES/WEATHER

Background

Colorado is one of only five states with any heat-related worker protections. While Colorado does have [heat-related protections for agricultural workers](#) and state labor laws do mandate breaks for all workers, there are no specific heat-related or extreme temperature protections for the majority of indoor and outdoor workers.

Excessive heat significantly impacts the health and safety of outdoor workers, especially workers of color. Prolonged exposure to high temperatures can lead to heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke, which can be fatal if not promptly treated. These conditions reduce productivity, increase the risk of accidents, and can result in long-term health issues.

All workers exposed to extreme temperatures need protections, including construction workers, roofers, landscapers, warehouse employees, and many others. Current laws and regulations in Colorado are inadequate.

Problem

Colorado workers who are exposed to extreme temperatures are subjected to dangerous (if not deadly) conditions. [Heat is the number one cause of weather related deaths in the United States. Occupational exposure to heat can result in injuries, disease, reduced productivity, and even death.](#)

Heat often goes unnoticed because it is invisible in many ways, but more people in the US are exposed to high heat risks than to floods or wildfires.

Extreme temperature-related risks aren't shared equally. A [2021 study from researchers at University of California and Stanford University](#) found that low-income workers experience five times as many heat-related injuries than those who are the highest earners. In the United States, outdoor workers face a disproportionate risk of heat-related death and among outdoor workers, heat-related fatalities occur disproportionately among Black and Hispanic people ([Gubernot et al., 2015](#)).

In a recent statewide poll commissioned by Voces Unidas, more than 85% of Latino registered voters in Colorado supported more protections for workers exposed to extreme temperatures.

As the planet warms, heat will become an even bigger issue for workers and the industries that depend on them. 2023 was the hottest year on record for the planet and experts say that 2024 will likely surpass 2023.

[California](#), [Minnesota](#), [Oregon](#) and [Washington](#) have already passed laws that provide protection to workers. [OSHA also recently proposed a federal rule](#) that, if adopted, would address heat safety in some cases.

Colorado should lead on worker protections. The time is now to act.

Policy Solution

Legislation is needed to protect all workers who encounter high temperatures or extreme weather in their workplaces – whether indoor or outdoor – including construction workers, landscapers, warehouse employees, line workers, truck drivers, roofers and others.

A coalition of organizations, in partnership with Rep. Elizabeth Velasco, plan to propose legislation to add comprehensive heat safety and extreme temperature standards in state law, including the following:

- Training and education for employees on heat and cold related illness and protections available to them (in a language workers understand)
- Water breaks – with water provided by the employer
 - California, Oregon & Washington require 1 quart per hour per worker
- Physical breaks
 - Varied requirements depending on temperature
- Shade/shelter requirements
 - Shade must be present, or provided, for employees when the heat threshold has been met
 - Employees exposed to cold temperatures also need shelter to warm up
- Acclimatization plans
 - Includes monitoring new workers when they're in an acclimatization period or when someone is returning to a high heat environment after a prolonged period away
- Specifying employer requirements when there is a temperature related illness
- Employer required heat illness prevention plans

In addition to heat safety standards, legislation must have strong definitions, including:

- Heat and cold threshold triggering protection requirements
 - Current law for agriculture workers is 80 degrees, which is similar to California, Oregon and Washington
- List all workers that would be covered
- New terms like acclimatization
- More

Coalition Partners

- Coming soon