



ANTHONY G. BROWN, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Media Contacts:  
[press@oag.state.md.us](mailto:press@oag.state.md.us)  
410-576-7009

## Attorney General Brown Takes Action to Protect Workers from Occupational Heat Exposure

*Coalition of Attorneys General Urge OSHA, Congress, and the Biden Administration to Enact an Emergency Extreme Heat Standard Before This Summer*

**BALTIMORE, MD (February 14, 2024)** – Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown has joined a coalition of 11 Attorneys General to protect farmworkers and construction workers from the dangers of exposure to extreme heat in the workplace. The coalition [petitioned](#) the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to implement a nationwide emergency extreme heat standard to take effect this summer to protect these workers from heat exposure.

Despite rising temperatures and intensifying heat waves, and the grave dangers they pose to workers, OSHA currently has no occupational heat standard in place. The coalition also [called on Congress](#) to pass pending legislation directing OSHA to put into effect an interim heat standard while it considers a permanent standard, and they [urged the White House](#) to support these efforts to protect the nation’s most heat-vulnerable workers.

“Marginalized communities make up a higher percentage of workers in the agriculture and construction industries and are oftentimes forced to work under extreme conditions to earn a livelihood,” **said Attorney General Brown**. “These workers deserve standards that protect their health and safety, especially when their lives are on the line supporting the foundation of our economy.”

Extreme heat refers to a period of excessively hot weather with above average temperatures, usually combined with high humidity. Climate change is increasing the severity, duration, and frequency of extreme heat events. Extreme heat exposure affects millions of workers across the country and can cause a range of heat-related illnesses, including heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Prolonged, repeated exposure to extreme heat can even cause chronic kidney disease. Extreme heat can also negatively impact preexisting medical conditions, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and can even worsen psychiatric conditions.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, [at least 436 workers died from heat exposure](#) from 2011 through 2021. Summer 2023 was the hottest summer ever recorded in the Northern Hemisphere, bringing soaring temperatures and unrelenting heatwaves to communities across the United States. As a result, vulnerable workers such as farm and construction workers endured unprecedented heat and humidity, resulting in several deaths:

- In June 2023, a 46-year-old construction worker died from hyperthermia at an outdoor construction site in East Texas, when the region was experiencing daily high temperatures around 100°F.
- In June 2023, a 66-year-old postal worker who had delivered mail in Dallas, Texas for 35 years died of heat stroke while working in extreme heat conditions.
- In July 2023, a 26-year-old farmworker and father of two died of heat stroke after collapsing in a field near Yuma, Arizona as temperatures soared above 110°F.
- In July 2023, a 29-year-old Guatemalan immigrant died while picking fruit on a farm in Homestead, Florida during an unprecedented heatwave.
- In August 2023, a warehouse worker died while working in part of a distribution center in Memphis, Tennessee that did not have air conditioning.

Summer 2024 is expected to be even hotter than 2023, putting workers at even greater risk of heat-related illness, injury, and death.

In the petition, the coalition reminds OSHA that the agency is legally obligated to set an emergency temporary standard if it finds that workers are exposed to a grave danger in the workplace and an emergency standard is necessary to protect workers from that danger. The potential danger of extreme heat impacts a range of occupations but is particularly severe for farmworkers and construction workers. Farmworkers are 35 times more likely to die of heat exposure than other members of the general population, and construction workers account for 36 percent of heat-related workplace deaths each year. The coalition calls on OSHA to fulfill its legal obligation to workers and issue an emergency temporary standard, including a heat exposure threshold and required preventative measures, such as water breaks and shade, for farmworkers and construction workers by May 1.

In addition, the coalition is calling on Congress to pass and the White House to sign the Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness, Injury, and Fatality Prevention Act ([H.R. 4897/S. 2501](#)), legislation that would direct OSHA to establish near- and long-term measures to protect workers from extreme heat. The legislation is named for Asunción Valdivia, a farmworker who died of heatstroke after picking grapes for 10 hours in extreme heat.

Compared to other workers, illness, injury, and death from heat exposure impacts workers of color and low-wage workers more. These populations are also overrepresented in those occupations most vulnerable to extreme heat, including labor-intensive outdoor work like agriculture and construction. OSHA has previously [recognized](#) that certain workers are at an increased risk of occupational heat illness not only because of the nature of their work, but also because of factors such as race, ethnicity, or language.

In petitioning OSHA and sending letters to Congress and the White House, Attorney General Brown joins the Attorneys General of New York, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

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