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The proposed regulation for preventing heat injuries and illnesses is set to place substantial burdens on small enterprises in New Mexico, hindering economic development and impacting local dining establishments. Cases of heat-related illnesses in these restaurants are uncommon, and many already implement measures to ensure staff safety.

Employees in restaurants do not face outdoor heat shifts, have cooling zones, access to shaded areas, and cool drinks readily available. This one-size-fits-all regulatory approach fails to consider industry differences, leading to needless documentation and regulatory burdens on eateries that lack the manpower to adhere. Restaurants should be excluded from this regulation.

Rather than imposing strict rules, I advocate for endorsing voluntary guidelines and exemplary practices for preventing heat-related illnesses. OSHA's existing Heat Illness Prevention Campaign already offers valuable resources and directions for maintaining safety for employers and employees alike. Many dining establishments are proactively safeguarding their staff, and enhancing these initiatives is preferable to enforcing new regulations that place untenable requirements on businesses regarding scheduling and monitoring.

The New Mexico Environment Department ought to consider a more adaptable strategy that balances worker safety with economic growth. Mandating high-cost upgrades, mandated breaks, and acclimation protocols will perturb operations, elevate costs, and further strain an industry already burdened with staffing difficulties. By collaborating with businesses and employees, practical solutions that favor all parties can be developed.

Administrative and financial challenges posed by this rule will be especially harsh on smaller eateries, which are already battling to survive. Introducing additional regulatory tasks will only complicate their ability to function effectively while safeguarding their workforce.