

Robin Richard

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this rule.

I am a general internal medicine physician who has provided care to people in the Four Corners area for 22 years. Currently, I work in New Mexico providing medical care to the Diné. I worked for many years in Cortez, CO, and many people there work in outdoor occupations in New Mexico. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge, clinical expertise, and compassion to the preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness. I particularly have a lot of experience caring for adults with multiple and complex illnesses.

Unfortunately, many Diné, even at young ages, experience illnesses that place them at high risk of suffering from heat-related illness. Many Diné also work in industries that expose them to heat such as the oil and gas industry, construction, and road crews, just to name a few.

Having lived and worked in this area for over 2 decades, I have directly observed temperatures getting warmer, and they will continue to get warmer as the years pass. Outdoor workers will become increasingly at risk for heat related illness and death. We must also remember that indoor workers are not protected from the ravages of heat exposure, either. Last week I saw a woman whose health is suffering because of the heat she works in for 8-10 hours a day in a commercial kitchen lacking air-conditioning and fans. I had to write a letter to her employer to make accommodations for her to access cool spaces.

As a physician, I know that preventing illness is foundational to keeping people active and healthy and working! Illnesses of various kinds cause people to miss work which affects their personal finances as well as the functioning of the business for which they work. I suspect many people who are exposed to heat receive New Mexico Medicaid benefits. Thus, if they are made ill from heat, New Mexico is likely paying for their medical care.

Heat related illness and death is HIGHLY PREVENTABLE with simple, affordable, and low-tech measures. No person's job should require that they sacrifice their health or lives when the danger of heat can be virtually eliminated. Thus, I am in support of protecting my patients and all people who work in New Mexico with the proposed rule for Heat Illness and Injury Prevention.

While many employers do care for the well-being of their employees and take steps to protect them from occupational heat hazards, many do not. Many employers and employees are unaware of the very real dangers that heat can cause. Many employers and employees who do understand heat is a danger do not know how to mitigate this danger. A heat protection standard would be helpful to employees and employers alike. Furthermore, people who are suffering from heat exposure have increased risk of injury at work, poorer cognitive function, increased emotional distress leading to conflicts at work, and decreased work performance. Studies show people afforded protections from heat are more productive at work than those who are not. Therefore, heat protections for workers are beneficial to employee and employer alike.

Please help keep the people of the Four Corners area healthy and well by implementing the Heat Illness and Injury Prevention Rule.

With the deepest concern for everyone's good health,

Robin Richard, MD, FACP, DCM