Cal-OSHA Investigating Two suspected Heat Illness Fatalities

FRESNO, Calif. -- The California Department of Industrial Relations' (DIR) Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) Chief Ellen Widess announced today that Cal/OSHA is actively investigating two suspected heat related deaths in the 2012 summer heat season. Widess reminds employers to be vigilant to protect outdoor workers from the hazards of heat this summer by taking the basic steps of water, shade, rest, and training.

"While our field inspections reveal that many employers are complying with California's first in the nation heat standard, we are deeply concerned that some employers are still not providing the basic protections to their workers," said DIR Director Christine Baker. "We will use all our resources and expand partnerships with labor and employers to protect workers in all outdoor occupations this summer."

The most recent suspected heat related death occurred Friday afternoon and involved a 66 year old farmworker who collapsed in Coalinga while pruning fruit trees in high heat conditions. The other case under investigation involves an 18 year old masonry worker in a small construction business in Friant who on May 9 fell unconscious as the crew was cleaning up for the day and died the following day.

"Persistent training, outreach and enforcement efforts have made a big difference in compliance among many of these employers," noted Cal/OSHA Chief Ellen Widess. "Sadly, we are now investigating two suspected heat related deaths this season."

"We immediately responded in each case to determine what happened and whether there were violations of the heat standard," continued Cal/OSHA Chief Ellen Widess. "We will be out there in full force throughout the state all summer-through scheduled inspections and local 'heat wave' inspections when temperatures soar--to ensure compliance with the heat standard and to save workers' lives."

This spring, Cal/OSHA launched an extensive campaign to ensure that all outdoor workers are protected from heat illness. The campaign combines outreach and education with strong enforcement to ensure that all employers with outdoor workers know and comply with the Heat Standard. The target industries are agriculture, construction, and landscaping, with additional focus on other industries such as oil and gas and utilities.

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