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Residents cautioned about excessive heat illness during clean-up

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources is cautioning local residents who will be continuing outdoor storm clean-up efforts about heat-related illness as temperatures are expected to remain in the 90s all week.

Commissioner for Public Health and State Health Officer Dr. Marian Swinker says excessive heat can be dangerous if not taken seriously. Dr. Swinker says, "People who work outdoors are more likely to become dehydrated and are more likely to get heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to compensate and properly cool themselves. The body normally cools itself by sweating. But under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that several factors affect the body's ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather. When the humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly.

Dr. Swinker says residents who are planning to continue storm clean-up efforts this week should be aware of heat exhaustion symptoms including heavy sweating, weakness, clammy skin, fast weak pulse, nausea or vomiting, muscle cramps, headache, lightheadedness and fainting.

CDC offers these tips to stay healthy if working outdoor in excessive heat:

- Drink from two to four cups of water every hour while working. Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink.
- Avoid alcohol or liquids containing large amounts of sugar.
- Wear and reapply sunscreen as indicated on the package.
- Ask if tasks can be scheduled for earlier or later in the day to avoid midday heat.
- Wear a brimmed hat and loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Spend time in air-conditioned buildings during breaks and after work.
- Encourage co-workers to take breaks to cool off and drink water.
- Seek medical care immediately if you or a co-worker has symptoms of heat-related illness.

More information about heat-related illness may be found online at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/> or by calling your local health department.