

Announcer ([00:02](#)):

You are listening to the Safety Moment Podcast by Utility Safety Partners. Safety is always a good conversation and it's a click away. Here's your host, Mike Sullivan.

Mike Sullivan ([00:16](#)):

Welcome everybody to episode 55. I can't drive 55. Well, you have to drive 55 actually, I think out here in Alberta. Can even go a little faster. 110 kilometers an hour is probably closer to 65. Anyway, today we're going to do a bit of a different episode. It's basically a solo episode. We're going to talk about our own top five lists today, and this is well things you got to watch out for yourself, hazards in the workplace, some are workplace hazards and what you can do about them. Now, helping me through the episode today is the ever present and ever scent Doug Downs with the stories and strategies. Thanks for joining me today, Doug. You're my guest today or maybe I'm your guest.

Doug Downs ([00:59](#)):

I'm hazard number one in the summer. Number one, I'm the first danger. It's my middle name.

Mike Sullivan ([01:05](#)):

Well, the summer months we were just talking earlier in the summer months. They're fleeting. They go by so bloody fast. Yeah, it seems here we are. We're champing at the bit to get out there and well, it's nice in the morning and then it rains in the afternoon, then it's cold and it could snow. Who knows what's going to happen next and we're all waiting to get out there, plant and whatever we want to do and just enjoy the sun. But when the sun does come, boy, it's bright for a long time

Doug Downs ([01:32](#)):

And it's kind of in charge of us. So I agree. It's like we are mentally cued to get outside and for me, as soon as it's above 18, I know for others it's as soon as it's 10 degrees, they're out there working. I can't do it. But as soon as it's warmer, we get out there and we want to get the work done and you mentally forget that the sun has so much impact on our safety and our ability to even do the work. And the number one hazard here is fatigue, not just meaning the sun makes you more tired and you start dropping off drowsy, but it

Mike Sullivan ([02:09](#)):

Does zap you.

Doug Downs ([02:10](#)):

It does like fatigue. You get worn down in this quickly in the summer and

Mike Sullivan ([02:16](#)):

Even your breathing can be affected by it. If you have issues with your breathing, it can be harder to breathe when it's hot and really warm out and the colder weather, you can actually breathe a little better. So I mean your body's working overtime to keep you cool when it's hot out there and dehydration sets in pretty fast and the UV rays, they apparently trigger chemical changes in your body. So there's a lot of things happening now when you're out there working, you're probably quite happy that, hey, I'm outside and the time just passes. But beyond just those things, first thing first, what does your mom and dad always say? What on sunscreen, if you're going

Doug Downs ([02:55](#)):

To I thought it was clean underwear.

Mike Sullivan ([02:56](#)):

Well, there's that too. Sunscreen.

Doug Downs ([02:58](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Sullivan ([02:58](#)):

Alright. For those who wish to wear the undergarments, yes, put them on as well.

Doug Downs ([03:02](#)):

What I wear in my backyard is my own business. That's all I'm saying.

Mike Sullivan ([03:06](#)):

Well, I hope you have tall fences, but the first thing for sure, you want to make sure that you have your sunscreen on, but be ready for it because if you're working outside, you can get tired. If you're working in power equipment and you're tired, you're escalating the risk to yourself and everybody around you, so be ready for it. I think

Doug Downs ([03:26](#)):

You start mentally cutting corners too, right? Oh, for sure. Especially when you're fatigued and Ah, I've been out here for two hours, I just got to get this done and I don't have to go that. I don't need to measure that. I'm good.

Mike Sullivan ([03:39](#)):

Well, that's right, and this is as you start cutting corners or you start rushing, maybe you're not going to finish the project, you're actually going to end up in the emergency room. So just be careful what you're doing. Symptoms to indicate you maybe fatigued or maybe one of your colleagues that's fatigued is your weariness. You're becoming more irritable. Maybe you have reduced alertness or lack of motivation. If you are prone to headaches, you may get them more often if you're outside working, if you're not prone to headaches and you get one, it's probably you're getting dehydrated or maybe for loss of appetite. So keep hydrated and make sure that you find the shade. I know for me, I'm fairly pale skinned and I don't get brown. I get red and I have to be very careful to get back into the shade. I feel it. So just listen to yourself and make sure you drink plenty of water. And even a salty snack will help you because as you're sweating, you're actually losing salt as well.

Doug Downs ([04:42](#)):

A really, you wouldn't think of that. You'd think the salty snack is just going to make you thirstier, but you're right.

Mike Sullivan ([04:49](#)):

Well, I think it depends electrolytes what you Well, but you mean you don't want to sit there and eat a whole bag of chips either? That's not a good idea.

Doug Downs ([04:54](#)):

It's not good. Okay,

Mike Sullivan ([04:55](#)):

Alright. No, but I mean, it goes back to the old saying, I'm going to get my pound of salt out of you this week as you're digging these holes. But yeah, obviously there's a lot going on, but you want to again, just listen to your body but also be ready, wear a hat, find the shade, and if there's no breeze and it's super hot, there are times when people just shut down work

Doug Downs ([05:20](#)):

Hazard number two, heat related illness,

Mike Sullivan ([05:23](#)):

Heat stress. Yeah, that's kind of a blanket term for a handful of things. I guess the most common are heat rashes or heat cramps. Both generally occur because of excessive sweating. So if you're losing a lot of liquid, basically where 70% of us, you're going to start to react and you need to keep replenishing your liquids and keep making sure you drink lots of water. And there's certain other things that you have to watch out for as well. The heat rashes, small red bumps in the skin and the heat cramps, that can be really painful. Your muscles start to contract and just be really careful with that. Heat exhaustion is far more serious than rashes or cramps and it can happen when the body loses too much water from salt or sweating. So you got to really watch that as well.

Doug Downs ([06:17](#)):

Can you imagine trying to operate an auger or trimming the fence boat with a saw all and you're suffering from something like this? No chance.

Mike Sullivan ([06:25](#)):

I have a scar on my hand, one of my hands, years and years ago. I'm looking at it right now. I was trimming a hedge and when I lived at home at my parents' house, and I vividly remember I had just come home, I was playing baseball that day and I came home and I had not, apparently I had not trimmed a hedge that I was supposed to trim and by come hell or high water, I was going to trim it right then and there because I was being told to. And sure enough, I don't know what I did, but I have a feeling it was something like that and I gave my hand a good slice. And to this day I still have quite a scar on my hand. But you're

Doug Downs ([07:06](#)):

Lucky.

Mike Sullivan ([07:07](#)):

Well, I am actually. It was a big hedge and it was a big cedar hedge and it could have been a lot worse, could have lost a finger, but because I was under the gun from one of my parents, I didn't say anything. I just kept working right through it as a trooper that I would today. No, you got to watch for that. So just

be, if you're working gran home, you're working for somebody else, you're working on the job. It's the same thing. Take the same precautions.

Doug Downs ([07:35](#)):

How do you manage it? Heat stress?

Mike Sullivan ([07:37](#)):

Well, I mean if you can avoid working outdoors during the hottest period of the day. I mean in Alberta, in Calgary, the hottest period of the day is really maybe a couple of weeks, maybe three or four weeks. And that can come and go between July and August. But if you can avoid working outside during those peak periods of heat, that's not a bad thing. And because the sun is up so long here,

Doug Downs ([08:01](#)):

Which I think is noon to four or 5:00 PM

Mike Sullivan ([08:04](#)):

I think so. And because the days are so much longer here, sunlight is so much longer here, maybe your employer can adjust to that. I don't know. Maybe your personal schedule, you can adjust to that as well. So if you can do that using personal protective equipment that is appropriate to the weather conditions if possible. Maybe a cooling vest or cooling towels. Those are very popular. Wow,

([08:28](#)):

Great idea. Yeah, I have them around. So there's a lot you can do. The most extreme heat that I've experienced, and again, it's personal experience. I was actually seconded to work in Columbia and I was doing inspections on pipeline construction and a variety of things back in the mid two thousands. And the helicopter flew us into area where they had exposed a section of pipe for stress, corrosion cracking, and we had to wear fire retardant coveralls. It was 44 degrees Celsius. And the locals, they weren't even breaking a sweat. Whereas my colleague and I, we were like the abominable snowman, bugs bunny, we were literally melting away to nothing. And they had these bags of water, they were plastic bags full of water and they were putting them on our necks. We looked like we were about to die. So that is extreme. We're not used to it, obviously we're not used to the conditions. And there's that too. So be mindful if you have people from out of town even and they're not used to the weather conditions, that it's not going to affect everybody the same way.

Doug Downs ([09:40](#)):

If they come down, they don't get, they feel it, right? Sure they do. They're way up north. Or if

Mike Sullivan ([09:46](#)):

You have little people, right? If you have your kids, your grandkids around, make sure you have lots of water for them and make sure maybe there's a pool they can play in or something like that just to keep the heat off them. They do react differently and much faster.

Doug Downs ([09:59](#)):

And as an adult, I should take a beer break every half hour or so, just drink lots of beer and I'll be okay.

Mike Sullivan ([10:07](#)):

I'm not going to say that's a good idea or a bad. Depends what you're doing. I mean, if you're watching the grass grow and it's really stressful, then maybe that's okay. But if you're operating any heavy equipment, no, do not. Or power tools do not. That's just the given. You come to work ready to work, whether it's at work or at home.

([10:28](#)):

Are you looking to take USP endorsed training, whether that's ground disturbance or the locating and marketing training for the alternate locate provider program, then go to our website [utility safety.ca](#), and on the main page you can click on where's the line. It'll bring it to all the information you need to know about the alternate locate provider. If you go back to the main page and you click on committees, it'll bring up the training standards committee, education awareness, best practices, government relations, and how you might be able to join one of those committees. And if you are required to take USP endorsed training, then go to the training standards link and you'll see the endorsed training providers that are offering utility safety partners endorsed training. Then you've got dehydration. We're constantly drinking here. And for me, as a guy from the east and living here, I've been here for 30 plus years now, it's different. It's dry here and I find I get a lot thirsty, a lot faster. You heat up a lot faster here. Very dry heat. It feels like an oven if you're in that heat. If you're out east, you're dealing with humidity and it's a different heat altogether.

Doug Downs ([11:46](#)):

Different. Yeah.

Mike Sullivan ([11:48](#)):

And if you're thirsty, if you're experiencing, obviously you're going to have that feeling of thirst and fatigue and muscle cramps, nausea, which is, again, I've had the unfortunate experience of dealing with that once, dizziness, confusion. But the nausea that comes from dehydration is probably one of the worst forms of nauseous that you'll ever experience. It's horrible. And or hot and dry skin. And again, what can you do? Make sure that there is water readily available, have it nearby and keep drinking. Just keep drinking. And we're lucky now that we have these, I should do a product placement here with a USP type of thermos. I don't have it on me right now, actually. I do. Hold on.

Doug Downs ([12:35](#)):

Okay,

Mike Sullivan ([12:36](#)):

So we have, there's all kinds of things you can get and this is one of these fantastic click before you dig, thermos water bottle, basic of water bottle, but it keeps you put water in there in the morning, cold water. It is ice cold still at the end of the day. Can

Doug Downs ([12:53](#)):

I get that online?

Mike Sullivan ([12:54](#)):

You can go to the USP store, you go to utility safety.ca and go to the store. I think it's at the top right hand corner and you can order those now. I hope there's some left, otherwise I'm going to get the gears for that. But yes, there's a lot of things on our store that you can order that promotes click before you dig and wears the line, and that's just one of them.

Doug Downs ([13:18](#)):

How do I know? Are there signs that I can see that my hydration levels have started to suffer a little bit?

Mike Sullivan ([13:25](#)):

Yeah, I think from what I understand, you can start to, I won't say hallucinate, that's the wrong word, but you can true, your perception can be off compared to what it normally would be. And then there's other signs as well. But you're going to know, and if you're working with people, make sure you're asking each other. Take a drink. I mean, stay

Doug Downs ([13:51](#)):

Hydrated. Not to be overly sensitive, but when you use the washroom, the color of your urine is another indicator. Right?

Mike Sullivan ([13:59](#)):

Okay. I did not know that.

Doug Downs ([14:00](#)):

Strong yellow, yeah, is can be a sign amongst other dietary things.

Mike Sullivan ([14:05](#)):

I did not know that. Now Doug Downs, not only is he stories and strategies, he's a physician as well.

Doug Downs ([14:12](#)):

That's right. Dr. Doug.

Mike Sullivan ([14:14](#)):

Doug,

Doug Downs ([14:15](#)):

Yeah. And so that's hazard number three. Hazard number four is sun exposure.

Mike Sullivan ([14:20](#)):

And not to be confused with exposure to heat. I mean heat's one thing and you feel like you're in an oven, that type thing. But direct exposure to the hot summer sun and its intense UV rays, that is a big hazard to workers and in some work areas you can't escape it. If you're working on the road, there is no shade, there is no nothing. So you have to be

Doug Downs ([14:43](#)):

Ready's bouncing off the pavement and getting nothing. Heat. Oh my

Mike Sullivan ([14:45](#)):

God. Yeah, the radiant heat from that blacktop has got to be horrible. So you've got to be ready for that as well. Workers who spend long periods of time outside are obviously the most risk and construction workers and garden workers, and you see that people who work for parks and recreation, they're well covered today and it's not heavy clothing, it's loose clothing, lots of cotton. They have hats on, they have the veils that go over the back of the neck, maybe the ears protect those things. I mean, the ears, the nose, those are high risk areas for too much sun, UV rays and skin cancers. So you want to make sure those things are covered. Use, as I said earlier, make sure you're using sunscreen whenever you can. Make sure it's the right sunscreen for you. And if you detect anything peculiar on your skin, get it checked out.

Doug Downs ([15:49](#)):

What about my coworkers? What if I'm part of a crew and Mike is more wobbly than normal out there in the workplace?

Mike Sullivan ([15:59](#)):

I wonder, I mean, what's up with Mike? Well, again, there's so many things that could be affecting the person. If it's the heat, if it's the sun, the dehydration, work fatigue, how long has he been out there, those cramps, then they start to break down the person. So again, just be mindful of it. If you're a foreman, if you're in charge of a crew, those are the things you got to watch for. It's not just slips, trips and falls. It's the conditions you're working in. And if it's sunny, if it's hot, that is a hazard. You got to watch for that as well.

Doug Downs ([16:37](#)):

Then hazard number five, road construction work.

Mike Sullivan ([16:40](#)):

Yeah. Well, there's a lot of road construction work. I mean, once the digging season begins in earnest, the Alberta Road Builders and Heavy Construction Association, they are working very hard. They're doing a lot of road resurfacing or curb reconstruction. They're actually one of our highest users of our Qlik before you dig service and oh, those crews are outside just kind of like we were just talking about before. Now beyond the sun and all those dehydration and everything we just talked about, there's some real other hazards to watch for and you're working on the road. You are working right alongside motorists and the motorists, God love 'em all, but they have other things in mind most of the time. And it's usually your safety as a road crew is not the highest priority for them. They're thinking about the destination where they got to get to. They're thinking, oh, I'm stuck in this traffic. I got to get past this clump of vehicles. So having the speeding motorists at top of mind when you're working is always something you got to be concerned about moving vehicles inside the work zone. Again, it's a major hazard. So beyond all those things, if you are getting dehydrated, you're starting to wobble,

([17:59](#)):

What are you wobbling into? That would be a concern as well.

Doug Downs ([18:03](#)):

And as a motorist plan ahead,

Mike Sullivan ([18:06](#)):

Put

Doug Downs ([18:06](#)):

Yourself the next

Mike Sullivan ([18:07](#)):

Time. Yeah. Today there's no excuse for, I didn't know there's going to be construction here. You can look on whether you're using Waze or Google Maps, it'll show you exactly where there's a delays, that type thing and work around it. There's no reason to get upside these days.

Doug Downs ([18:24](#)):

And if you're in the lane beside slowed down for heaven

Mike Sullivan ([18:27](#)):

Sakes. Oh yeah. And we've all seen those signs of my dad works here or something like that to appeal to our better self. And those signs are there because somebody probably did get hurt and it was completely avoidable. And so yeah, you want to make sure that you're taking care of those things. And obviously as the worker, you're wearing hi-vis gear and you see that everywhere today, whether it's the orange or fluorescent orange fluorescent yellow or green type of jumpsuit almost. And for those people who are working out there, the flag people who are working, the men and women, those are very hot to wear those jumpsuits, but they're highly visible. Bit of a double-edged sword. But again, when you drive by, you'll see they have lots of water. They have a place, usually an umbrella of something they can stand under when they need to. And just be mindful, put yourself in their position that this is not an easy job and not take care of each other.

Doug Downs ([19:35](#)):

Simple all common sense stuff in the summer. It is surprising anyone with anything, but it's so important to keep it top of mind. Oh,

Mike Sullivan ([19:43](#)):

It absolutely is. And changing seasons, it brings a host of safety challenges to everybody, outdoor workers. And if you can identify and understand the hazards and advance and take steps to manage the risk well, you can ensure your own workers remain safe. And really that's what we are looking for is just to be safe and recognize that, particularly here in Alberta and well most of Canada, but really here in Alberta and the prairies, we are jamming a year's worth of construction into, could be eight months, could be seven months, could be nine months if we're lucky, could be even less. And we're trying now. We do have those long days and that makes up for it a little bit, but we're still jamming a lot of construction into a very short window of time.

Doug Downs ([20:31](#)):

Those long days, we just try to do more and more outside. So these are good reminders

Mike Sullivan ([20:36](#)):



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We do, and I've done it myself. I'm outside doing whatever in the lawn or something on the lawn or something like that, and I, wow, I'm really tired. And I look at my watch, oh, no wonder it's 10 30 at night and it's still bright. I mean, no wonder I'm tired. I get up at five. So that's a long day and you got to recognize that. But make the best of it. Enjoy the summer. It's not here for very long, but enjoy it in a really safe way is the best way to do it.

[\(21:06\)](#):

That's going to wrap things up on episode 55 of the Safety Moment podcast. I want to thank our producer, Mr. Doug Downs from the stories and strategies, and I hope you choose to follow this podcast on any directory you're listening on. And please do leave a rating. You can follow us on Twitter slash X at Utility Safety, and we're also on Instagram and Facebook. And if you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, email us at [info@utilitysafety.ca](mailto:info@utilitysafety.ca) and put podcast in the subject header. I'm Mike Sullivan, president Utility Safety Partners. Click to know what's above and below. One click costs you nothing, not clicking. Well, that could cost you everything.