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## U.S. Workers Face Rising Heat Stress Risks, UN Warns

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The United Nations has issued a warning that millions of workers worldwide, including those in the United States, are increasingly at risk of heat-related illnesses due to rising temperatures. The report, released this week by the International Labour Organization (ILO), calls for greater attention to practical safeguards rather than blanket regulations to protect employees exposed to extreme heat.

According to the ILO, heat stress occurs when the human body cannot regulate its temperature effectively, leading to exhaustion, dehydration, or even life-threatening conditions such as heatstroke. The report highlights that outdoor and physically demanding jobs such as construction, agriculture, and delivery services face the greatest risk.

In the United States, several states have already experienced record-breaking heat waves this summer, intensifying concerns over worker safety. Federal data shows that heat-related illnesses are responsible for hundreds of workplace incidents each year, with cases often underreported.

The ILO estimates that globally, more than 2 billion workers are regularly exposed to high temperatures. Without stronger protections, the economic cost of lost productivity due to heat stress could exceed \$2 trillion annually. In the U.S., the agriculture and construction sectors are particularly vulnerable, with outdoor workers facing long hours in direct sunlight.

Health experts stress that heat-related illnesses are preventable with proper safeguards. These include voluntary measures such as regular rest breaks, shaded recovery areas, access to water, and flexible work schedules during peak heat hours. Some U.S. states, such

as California, have enacted workplace heat protection standards, while others rely on federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines.

Labor groups have urged OSHA to issue a national standard for heat protection, citing growing risks as summers become hotter. Critics argue, however, that heavy-handed federal rules could burden small businesses, and that many protections can be achieved through employer initiatives and personal responsibility rather than sweeping mandates. Employers are encouraged to implement monitoring systems and provide training for recognizing early signs of heat-related illness.

The UN's warning serves as a reminder that protecting workers from extreme heat is not only a health priority but also an economic one. Ensuring that workers remain safe and productive in high-temperature environments will require both individual vigilance and employer-driven solutions, with government oversight playing a supporting role rather than a controlling one.

For U.S. industries that depend heavily on outdoor labor, the challenge is clear: without proactive measures, rising heat will continue to pose serious risks to workers' health and business operations alike.