

Baby, It's Hot Outside



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Eight long months ago, in an article titled “[Baby, It's Cold Outside](#),” I wrote about how increasingly cold temperatures prompted me to reflect on the idea that thoughtful planning and goal setting go “hand in glove” with effective risk management. Now that the temperatures in the Mid-Atlantic are hovering uncomfortably close to triple digits, I’m finding it hard to imagine ever wearing a pair of leather gloves. Warmer temperatures offer a timely reminder about warm weather safety and a variety of potential sticky risk management issues, including personal hygiene in the workplace. Let’s start with safety.

In a recent issue of the company’s informative online newsletter, *Safety InsightsSM*, our colleagues at [Safe-Wise Consulting, LLC](#) offered the following warm weather reminders and tips:

- Remember that staff, volunteers and summer program participants need to know practical steps for preventing health problems and avoiding potential tragedies caused by high temperatures.
- Nonprofits that offer warm weather programs should recognize their responsibility for providing practical heat stress training for staff and supervisors.
- The following precautions are “musts” if your nonprofit’s caregivers and service recipients will be spending time outdoors on warm summer days:
 - First, keep hydrated (drink a glass of water every 15 to 30 minutes to prevent overheating),
 - Next, take breaks to cool down (at least a 10- or 15-minute break every two hours), and
 - Finally, remember to adapt your pace to the weather.

Need help? The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) has developed a handy [Quick Card](#) featuring an explanation of the symptoms of heat stress and heat stroke and clear tips on “what to do” to prevent heat stress. The Quick Card also outlines essential steps if you encounter an individual whose systems indicate heat stress.

When Your Staff Stinks... Literally!

From time to time nonprofit leaders complain about poor performing staff, but during the hot summer months a reference to an employee who “stinks” may be a literal one. Many years ago I worked in an office that employed numerous short-term interns. One particular intern brought an unpleasant odor with her to work every day. Several employees pleaded with “the boss” to speak to the young lady about the need for appropriate personal hygiene in a stuffy office environment. He refused to do so, admitting that he was simply too embarrassed to

bring up the topic of body odor with a member of the opposite sex.

While it's unlikely that any nonprofit leader looks forward to addressing the topic of body odor, from time to time addressing the subject of personal hygiene with a direct report may be one of those "other duties" referenced in your job description. The [Society for Human Resource Management](#) counsels that the goal of a conversation about body odor should be "to fix the problem without insulting or embarrassing anyone and ensuring that the person is treated with dignity and respect."

What Not To Do...

- Don't schedule an all-hands meeting to discuss the topic of personal hygiene and "hope" that the offender shows up for work that day AND gets the hint.
- Don't put off addressing the issue indefinitely and simply pray for an early and cooler-than-usual Fall.
- Don't insert comments about personal appearance or hygiene into an employee's annual performance review.

What To Do...

- Remember to express caring and concern for an employee during any discussion on a sensitive topic such as body odor. If you fear you won't be able to address the topic without laughing, you may not be the right person for this difficult, but necessary task.
- Keep in mind that in some cases a trusted peer or friend in the workplace might be more effective in terms of conveying information about the negative impact of the employee's odor or hygiene issue.
- When you speak to an employee one-on-one make certain you focus on how the odor issue is impacting the work environment. For example, if a customarily well-liked employee is having a hard time recruiting volunteers for a project that requires a large, volunteer team, mention the possibility that personal hygiene rather than the appeal of the project may be a factor.
- Remember that cultural and ethnic differences may account for variations in personal hygiene in a multi-cultural workforce.

HR consultant Sheila Wyatt cautions against jumping to conclusions as to the cause of body odor, and adds that employers who find themselves in the difficult position of confronting an employee with an odor problem should always "Give the employee an opportunity to discuss the matter and provide possible solutions."

If your nonprofit needs help developing an appropriate dress code or personal hygiene policy, the Center may be able to help. The Center's online tool—[My Risk Management Policies](#)—contains customizable templates in 22 areas of nonprofit operations, including human resources. The one-time cost for the tool is \$179, and the price includes unlimited access to a growing library of easy to customize templates. The HR section of [My Risk Management Policies](#) includes template Dress Code and Personal Hygiene policies.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic, feedback on this article and questions about the Center's resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at [www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/](https://nonprofitrisk.org/) and offers [consulting assistance](#) to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.