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Suss out a good employee before you hire them

By June Campbell

A good employee is one of your company's greatest assets. A poor employee is a liability.

Poor employees are unsuited for the position they fill. They might lack the skills needed to do the work. Or, their work habits and personalities are incompatible with your business environment. They could be excellent employees at a different workplace -- but not at yours.

The best time to weed out unsuitable employees is before you've hired them. After they're on the job, dealing with the problem will be time-consuming, stressful, unpleasant and expensive. HR experts say that supervisors typically spend 80% of their time with 20% of their employees.

When you're recruiting, you want to know two things:

1. Can this person do the job?
2. Will he or she be a problem to manage in this workplace?

The first question is simple to answer. Skills are easy to assess and to test. Look to samples of work, educational criteria, licenses, accreditations, skill tests, etc.

The second question is the hard one. You want to discover whether the applicant

will fit into your workplace.

Before conducting the job interview, be sure you know what questions are illegal to ask in your country. Make an error here, and you could be faced with legal proceedings.

Once you know what's legal and what isn't, create interview questions designed to discover the applicant's "soft skills."

Examples:

1. Tell me about your favorite supervisor in the past, and why you liked working for this person. Then, your least favorite supervisor, and why? Identifying information is not necessary.

This will elicit information about how the applicant responds to supervision and how he prefers to be supervised.

2. Describe a difficult workplace situation that you faced, and that you think you handled well. Then, tell me about a workplace situation that you don't think you handled very well and what you could do differently next time.

You are looking for clues about how the applicant deals with conflict and difficult situations. In the situation that was handled poorly, try to determine if the

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At A Glance

Protect workers from
lead exposure

Tired? Sleep apnea
may be the culprit

Dry lightning can
lead to wildfires

Be aware of the quality
of the air you breathe

Understanding safe
use of chemicals

... and more

Recruit: Know what questions you can and can't ask

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person has learned from the mistake.

3. Describe a situation that is likely to occur, or has occurred, in your workplace. Ask the applicant how he or she would handle it.

You are looking for problem solving and judgment skills. Remember that the applicant is not familiar with your workplace and cannot be expected to provide the exact response that you would expect from your employees.

4. How many sick days have you taken from work in the past year?

Asking direct questions about the applicant's health is illegal in many countries. Asking about sick days is not. If the applicant has missed considerable time, ask if there is any current condition that would interfere with his or her ability to have a good attendance record.

An existing medical condition doesn't mean the applicant is unsuitable, but you do want to know how reliable and dependable he will be.

5. Are you able to work shifts? Graveyard shifts? Weekends? Are you available for business travel?

In many countries, it's illegal to ask questions about marital status and whether the person has family obligations. But you are entitled to know whether they are free to work the shifts you have available and if they are free to travel, if travel is a requirement of the job.

6. This is our policy regarding smoking/dress code/alcohol and drug use while on the job. Are you willing and able to abide by this policy?

It could be illegal to ask about an applicant's use of tobacco, alcohol or illicit drugs. But it is legal to explain your workplace policy and ask if they will abide by it.

7. Where do you see yourself in five years?

You are trying to find out if the person's long term goals are compatible with your workplace. If they are planning to move to another city, retire, quit work to raise children or to attend school, you will want to know it.

Or, if they want to climb the ladder, does your workplace offer an opportunity? On the other hand, if they are looking for a job to settle into for years, is that possible in your workplace?

Get the answers you were looking for? Do your reference checks, then Ready, Set, HIRE!

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Lead exposure is a danger to your workers

By Charlie Bentson King

For complete up-to-date standards on lead safety in California, visit www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5198.html

Lead is a base metal with many uses. Lead is also a toxic substance, which can cause serious health problems. OSHA Lead Standards are aimed at protecting workers who may be exposed to lead by requiring workplace monitoring and employee training. The two standards, workplace monitoring and employee training, deal with different types of work environments. Yet each standard contains many similarities.

Both standards require employers to set up worker training programs covering the health effects and risks of lead exposure. Training must take place before employees can begin work. Periodic training refresher courses are also required. OSHA requires employers to setup a "Medical Surveillance Program" to help prevent lead poisoning. Employers must also maintain a written compliance program (the Exposure Control Plan) to document and describe the methods used to protect employees from lead exposure.



Although lead is common in everyday life, it can have serious health effects. When lead is absorbed into the body, in large amounts, exposure can be fatal. There are two types of overexposure that can occur from excessive amounts of

lead: (1) Chronic refers to the presence of small amounts of lead which are continually absorbed and accumulated in the body, (2) Acute refers to cases where large amounts of lead are absorbed in the body in a short period of time.

Lead can enter the body in two ways:

1. Inhalation. By breathing in dust or fumes.
2. Ingestion. By swallowing lead dust.

Once lead enters into the body and touches vital organs such as the stomach or lungs, it is absorbed into the bloodstream. While they do

Please see LEAD, page 6

Sleep apnea is a chronic, but treatable, condition

Sleep apnea is a common sleep disorder characterized by interruptions in breathing during sleep. Many people are not aware they have sleep apnea, but can be affected by short-term problems like fatigue and brain fog. In the long term, untreated sleep apnea can cause serious health concerns.



There are three types of sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is the most common type of sleep apnea and occurs when the throat muscles relax, leading to a partial or complete blockage of the airway. Central sleep apnea (CSA) is caused by the brain's failure to transmit proper signals to the muscles that control breathing. Complex sleep apnea syndrome (CSAS): This condition involves a combination of both obstructive and central sleep apnea.

The causes of sleep apnea can vary depending on the type of sleep apnea. Here are some common factors associated with each type:

1. Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA):

- **Obesity:** Excess weight can lead to the accumulation of fatty tissues around the airway, narrowing it and causing obstructions.

- **Anatomical abnormalities:** Certain physical characteristics, such as a large tongue, tonsils, or a narrow airway, can contribute to OSA.

- **Age and gender:** OSA is more prevalent in older individuals and men, although it can affect people of any age or gender.

- **Family history:** There may be a genetic predisposition to developing OSA.

- **Smoking and alcohol:** These substances can relax the muscles in the throat, increasing the likelihood of airway blockages.

- **Nasal congestion:** Chronic nasal congestion, from allergies or structural issues, can obstruct airflow.

2. Central Sleep Apnea (CSA):

- **Disorders affecting the brainstem:** Medical conditions like stroke, brain tumors, or neurological diseases can disrupt the brain's control over breathing.

- **Heart failure:** CSA can be a result of heart failure, as it affects the regulation of breathing.

- **Medications:** Certain medications, such as opioids or sedatives, can affect the brain's respiratory centers and contribute to CSA.

In addition to these factors, there are several risk factors that can increase the likelihood of developing sleep apnea, including a family history of the condition, being overweight or obese, having a large neck circumference, being male, and aging.

Symptoms of Sleep Apnea

- Symptoms of sleep apnea include:
- Loud and chronic snoring

- Pauses in breathing during sleep, witnessed by someone else
- Excessive daytime sleepiness and fatigue
- Morning headaches
- Difficulty concentrating and poor memory
- Irritability and mood changes
- Dry mouth or sore throat upon waking
- Frequent urination at night
- Decreased libido
- Restless sleep or insomnia

Risks of untreated sleep apnea

If left untreated, sleep apnea can have negative consequences for both physical and mental health. Here are some of the risks associated with untreated sleep apnea:

1. **Daytime Fatigue and Impaired Cognitive Function:** Sleep apnea disrupts normal sleep patterns, leading to poor sleep quality. As a result, individuals with untreated sleep apnea often experience excessive daytime

Sleep: Daytime fatigue increases risk of accidents

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sleepiness, fatigue, and lack of energy. This can impair concentration, memory, and overall cognitive function, affecting performance at work or school and increasing the risk of accidents, including motor vehicle accidents.

2. Cardiovascular Problems: Sleep apnea is associated with an increased risk of developing or worsening cardiovascular conditions. The repeated interruptions in breathing cause fluctuations in blood oxygen levels and increased stress on the cardiovascular system. Over time, this can lead to high blood pressure (hypertension), irregular heart rhythms (arrhythmias), heart failure, coronary artery disease, and an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes.

3. Metabolic and Endocrine Disorders: Sleep apnea has been linked to metabolic disorders such as insulin resistance, glucose intolerance, and type 2 diabetes. Disrupted sleep patterns and the associated release of stress hormones can negatively affect insulin sensitivity, glucose regulation, and overall metabolic health.

4. Weight Gain and Obesity: Sleep apnea and obesity often go hand in hand. Obesity can contribute to the development of sleep apnea, and the presence of sleep apnea can disrupt hormonal regulation, leading to weight gain and difficulty losing weight. This creates a cycle where obesity exacerbates sleep apnea, and sleep apnea further contributes to weight gain.

5. Mood Disorders and Mental Health Issues: Chronic sleep deprivation due to untreated sleep apnea can lead to mood swings, irritability, depression, and anxiety. The impact of disrupted sleep on mental health can affect overall



well-being, relationships, and quality of life.

6. Increased Risk of Accidents and Injuries: Excessive daytime sleepiness and impaired cognitive function resulting from sleep apnea increase the risk of accidents and injuries, both at home and in the workplace. This includes an increased risk of falls, workplace accidents, and motor vehicle accidents.

7. Decreased Quality of Life: Untreated sleep apnea can significantly reduce the quality of life, leading to decreased productivity, reduced enjoyment of daily activities, and strained relationships due to irritability, mood swings, and fatigue.

It's important to recognize the potential dangers of untreated sleep apnea and seek medical evaluation and appropriate treatment.

Treatment options for sleep apnea

Effective treatment can significantly improve symptoms, reduce associated health risks, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life. Treatment for

sleep apnea includes:

1. Lifestyle Changes: Making certain lifestyle modifications can help alleviate sleep apnea symptoms. These include weight loss (if overweight), regular exercise, avoiding alcohol and sedatives, quitting smoking, and sleeping on your side instead of your back.

2. Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP): The most common and effective treatment for sleep apnea is CPAP therapy. It involves wearing a mask over the nose or mouth during sleep, which delivers a constant flow of pressurized air to keep the airway open.

3. Oral Appliances: Some individuals may benefit from using oral devices that reposition the jaw and tongue to help keep the airway open during sleep.

4. Surgery: Surgical interventions may be considered for severe cases or when other treatments have failed. Procedures may involve removing excess tissue, repositioning the jaw, or correcting anatomical abnormalities.

5. Other Therapies: There are alternative treatments available, such as adaptive servo-ventilation (ASV), bilevel positive airway pressure (BiPAP), and positional therapy, which may be recommended depending on the specific type and severity of sleep apnea.

It's important to consult with a healthcare professional for an accurate diagnosis and to discuss appropriate treatment options based on individual circumstances.

Dry lightning is a late-summer danger

Dry lightning, a phenomenon where lightning occurs without accompanying rainfall, poses significant dangers to both natural environments and human communities. While lightning is often associated with rainstorms, dry lightning strikes can occur in arid or drought-stricken regions, igniting devastating wildfires and creating hazardous conditions. In California, arid heat can create the perfect conditions for dry lightning to create fire; some of the most destructive wildfires in recent years were started or abetted by the phenomenon. In this article, we will explore the dangers of dry lightning and its impact on ecosystems, property, and human lives.

Igniting Wildfires

Dry lightning is a notorious firestarter, particularly in areas with dry vegetation and low moisture levels. When lightning strikes the ground or flammable materials, such as trees, grass, or brush, it can instantly ignite a fire. These fires can spread rapidly, fueled by dry vegetation, strong winds, and difficult terrain, making them challenging to contain and extinguish.

Rapid Fire Spread

Dry lightning-induced wildfires have the potential to spread quickly due to the absence of precipitation to mitigate the flames. The combination of lightning strikes and dry conditions creates an ideal environment for fire growth and expansion. Flames can rapidly engulf vast areas, posing a significant threat to forests, grasslands, and residential communities located in or near fire-prone regions.

Increased Fire Intensity

Dry lightning strikes can result in fires with high heat intensity. Without the dampening effect of rain, fires fueled by dry lightning can burn hotter and more aggressively. Intense fires produce larger amounts of smoke, generate greater heat radiations, and release higher levels of toxic gases and particulate matter, contributing to poor

air quality and posing health risks to both wildlife and humans.

Challenging Fire Suppression Efforts

Dry lightning-caused wildfires often occur in remote or inaccessible areas, making fire suppression efforts challenging. Steep slopes, rugged terrain, and limited water sources can impede firefighting operations. Additionally, the unpredictability and rapid spread of these fires make it difficult for firefighters to establish containment lines and prevent further destruction.

Threat to Ecosystems and Biodiversity

Dry lightning-triggered wildfires can have severe ecological consequences. They can destroy habitats, decimate plant and animal populations, and disrupt delicate ecosystems. The loss of vegetation and destruction of habitats can impact wildlife survival, disrupt natural processes, and lead to long-term ecological imbalances.

Property Damage and Human Safety

Dry lightning poses a direct threat to human lives, property, and infrastructure. Wildfires ignited by dry lightning can rapidly encroach upon residential areas, placing communities at risk. Evacuations may be necessary to ensure the safety of residents. These fires can also damage or destroy structures, including homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure, leading to significant financial losses.

What You Can Do

Here are some measures individuals can take to avoid the dangers associated with dry lightning:

1. Stay informed: Stay updated on weather forecasts and warnings in your area. Pay attention to any alerts or notifications about dry lightning conditions.
2. Plan outdoor activities accordingly: If dry lightning is expected in your area, try to reschedule or

postpone outdoor activities, particularly those that involve open spaces or high-risk areas susceptible to wildfires.

3. Seek shelter: If you're outdoors and you see or hear thunder or see lightning, seek shelter immediately. Move indoors if possible or find a substantial, fully enclosed structure like a car with windows rolled up.

4. Avoid high-risk areas: Stay away from open fields, hilltops, high-elevation areas, and any other locations that are prone to wildfires. These areas are more likely to be struck by dry lightning.

5. Be prepared for wildfires: Dry lightning can ignite wildfires, so it's crucial to be prepared. Clear vegetation and debris from around your property, create defensible space, and ensure that you have proper fire safety equipment and tools available.

6. Report any wildfires: If you spot a wildfire or smoke in your area, report it immediately to the appropriate authorities. The sooner a wildfire is reported, the faster responders can take action to contain and extinguish it.

7. Stay indoors during storms: Even if you don't see lightning or hear thunder, it's safer to stay indoors during storms, as conditions can change quickly. Lightning can strike even several miles away from the storm.

Remember, dry lightning can be unpredictable and dangerous. It's important to prioritize your safety and take necessary precautions to avoid the risks associated with it. The dangers of dry lightning highlight the importance of proactive fire prevention measures, early detection systems, effective emergency response plans, and public awareness to mitigate the devastating impacts of these natural phenomena. Addressing climate change and promoting sustainable land management practices can help reduce the occurrence and severity of dry lightning-induced wildfires, ultimately safeguarding our environment and communities.

Wildfires, smog lead to polluted air

Recent fires in Canada and related effects on air quality in the U.S. reminds us: Air pollution poses significant dangers to both human health and the environment. Breathing polluted air at work, home, or outdoors creates issues including asthma, bronchitis, heart problems, and increased risk of cancer and associated diseases. Below are some of the dangers of breathing dirty air, and how we can keep ourselves and our workers safe.

Health dangers of air pollution

1. Respiratory Problems: Air pollution, particularly the presence of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and toxic gases, can cause or exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and other respiratory infections. Breathing in polluted air can lead to inflammation of the airways, reduced lung function, and increased susceptibility to respiratory

illnesses.

2. Cardiovascular Issues: Air pollution is linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks, strokes, and heart failure. The inhalation of pollutants can lead to the deposition of harmful particles in the bloodstream, causing inflammation, oxidative stress, and the formation of plaque in the arteries, which can restrict blood flow and contribute to cardiovascular problems.

3. Premature Death: Prolonged exposure to high levels of air pollution has been associated with an increased risk of premature death. The adverse health effects of air pollution, particularly on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems, can contribute to life-threatening conditions and shorten life expectancy.

4. Impaired Lung Development in Children: Children exposed to air pollution may experience impaired lung development, leading to long-term

respiratory problems and decreased lung function. This can have lasting effects on their health and well-being throughout their lives.

5. Increased Cancer Risk: Certain air pollutants, such as benzene, formaldehyde, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), have been classified as carcinogens. Prolonged exposure to these substances in polluted air increases the risk of developing various types of cancer, including lung cancer.

6. Allergies and Irritation: Air pollution can trigger or worsen allergic reactions, such as hay fever, and cause irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat. Symptoms may include sneezing, coughing, itchy or watery eyes, and sore throat.

7. Neurological and Cognitive Effects: Emerging research suggests that air pollution may have detrimental

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Lead: If symptomatic, seek medical attention

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occur, incidences of exposure to deadly levels of lead in the workplace are highly unusual. Still, small amounts of lead can accumulate over time and can eventually produce serious health problems.

“Chronic overexposure” can damage the body through the urinary system, the reproductive system and the nervous system. Symptoms of chronic overexposure include headache, dizziness, nausea, loss of appetite, a metallic taste, insomnia, excessive tiredness, muscle/joint pain or soreness, constipation and colic.

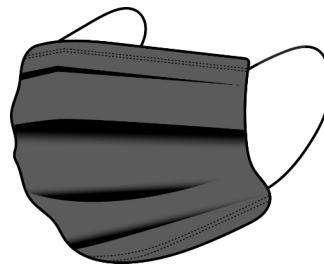
“Acute overexposure” can

cause fatigue, restlessness, headache, poor memory, vertigo, drowsiness, hallucinations, delirium, convulsions and coma. The most serious result of acute overexposure is Encephalopathy, which can cause death with as little as 48 hours after it produces seizures and eventually heart failure.

Anyone experiencing symptoms of lead overexposure should seek immediate medical attention.

OSHA Lead Standards are:

OSHA 29 CFR 1926.62 is OSHA’s Interim Final Rule for Lead in Construction. It covers a number of activities, including, renovation and



and recycling of lead batteries.

Individual employers working in industries that commonly use lead based products or employers who are commonly exposed to environments where lead based products may be used, are required to comply with OSHA Lead Standards through the implementation of specific training and monitoring procedures.

demolition involving lead-based materials and removal of lead-based paint.

OSHA 29 CFR 1910.1025 covers the use of lead in general industry. It includes lead smelting, manufacturing and the use of lead-based pigments contained in inks, paints and other solvents in addition to the manufacturing

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SAFETY ... IT PAYS



Learn how to respond to chemical spills

Your safety training helps ensure things go right when you do your job. Your training also includes what to do when things go wrong. You are trained to prevent spills when you work with chemicals, but your training also tells you how to respond to one.

Unplanned release of a chemical can have devastating effects. Skin and eye burns, damage to the lungs, fire and explosion, corrosive damage to materials, pollution of air, soil and water, and danger to the public are just some of the possible consequences of a chemical spill.

Chemical spills can be in the form of liquids, solids such as pellets, gases and vapors. They can be flammable (quick to burn or explode), corrosive (damaging to human tissue or other materials), or toxic (poisonous to humans and other living things).

The time to deal with a chemical

spill is long before it happens, by rehearsing what you will do and obtaining the supplies you will need for self-protection and cleanup.

First, you need to learn all you can about the chemicals used and stored in your work area. What are the hazards? What would happen if the chemical were exposed to air, oxygen, a spark, water or even motion? Is the chemical corrosive, causing burns to human tissue?

If breathed in, could it damage the respiratory system, cause unconsciousness or death? Are there possible long-term effects from chemical exposure, such as cancer? You will get this type of information from your training, the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS), container label and other sources.

Here are some basic procedures you can learn for dealing with a spill. Be

sure to get the specific steps you should take for the chemicals you work with.

- Alert people in the area of the spill.
- Call the appropriate emergency numbers, which should be posted at each telephone.
- Attend to any injured persons, removing them from exposure and getting to a safety shower if necessary.
- Depending on the nature of the chemical, you might need to open windows and doors to provide ventilation, close up the affected area to contain spills or turn off heat and other ignition sources.
- If you are trained and authorized, use the appropriate materials to absorb or contain the spill. For instance, you might have kits to neutralize spilled acids or bases. For other chemicals, you could be required to sprinkle an absorbent litter on a spill, or surround the spill with a dam.

Do not attempt cleanup under these circumstances:

- You don't know what the spilled material is.
- You don't have the necessary protection or the right equipment to do the job.
- The spill is too large.
- The spill is highly toxic.
- You feel symptoms of exposure.

Learn your part in the spill response plan for your department. If there is no such plan, ask your supervisor to work with the management and safety department in establishing it.

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



Pollution: Monitor airnow.gov for local levels

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effects on the brain and cognitive function. Prolonged exposure to pollutants, especially fine particulate matter, has been linked to neuroinflammation, cognitive decline, and an increased risk of neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

8. Environmental Impact: Air pollution also harms the environment, contributing to climate change, acid rain, and the deterioration of ecosystems. Pollutants released into the air, such as greenhouse gases and toxic chemicals, can lead to global warming, disruption of weather patterns, and the degradation of air, water, and soil quality.

Reducing air pollution requires collective efforts, including stricter emission standards, promoting clean energy sources, implementing effective pollution control measures, and adopting sustainable transportation and industrial practices.

Mitigate the dangers of bad air

Mitigating air pollution dangers, especially for people who work outside, requires a combination of preventive measures and appropriate protective equipment. Here are some strategies to help protect outdoor workers and others from the harmful effects of air pollution:

1. Monitor Air Quality: Stay informed about air quality levels in your area. Check local air quality indexes or use smartphone apps that provide real-time updates. If the air quality is poor, take additional precautions or consider rescheduling work activities if possible.

2. Limit Exposure: Minimize the time spent in heavily polluted areas or during periods of high pollution. Schedule work tasks strategically to avoid peak pollution hours, if feasible.

3. Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

- Respiratory Protection: Provide workers with appropriate respiratory protection, such as N95 or N99 respirators, when working in areas with high levels of pollutants or hazardous airborne particles. Ensure workers are trained in proper respirator use, fit, and maintenance.

- Eye Protection: If there is a risk of eye irritation from pollutants, provide workers with safety glasses or goggles to shield their eyes from particles and pollutants.

4. Implement Engineering Controls:

- Create Barriers: Erect physical barriers, such as windbreaks or temporary structures, to shield workers from polluted areas or high-traffic roads.

- Ventilation: Encourage the use of well-ventilated work areas or equipment cabs equipped with effective filtration systems to reduce exposure to pollutants.

5. Promote Hydration and Breaks: Encourage workers to stay hydrated by providing access to clean drinking water and reminding them to take regular breaks in shaded or well-ventilated areas, especially during hot and polluted conditions.

6. Education and Training:

- Provide comprehensive training on the potential health risks associated with air pollution and the proper use of protective equipment.

- Educate workers on recognizing symptoms of respiratory distress or other health issues related to air pollution and encourage them to report any concerns.

7. Health Monitoring:

- Conduct regular health screenings or check-ups to monitor the respiratory health of outdoor workers exposed to air pollution.

- Encourage workers to seek medical attention if they experience persistent respiratory symptoms or any other health issues related to air pollution exposure.

8. Supportive Policies and Practices:

- Advocate for workplace policies that prioritize worker health and safety, including measures to mitigate air pollution risks.

- Collaborate with local authorities, environmental agencies, and occupational health professionals to develop guidelines and recommendations specific to outdoor workers' protection from air pollution.

Remember, addressing air pollution dangers is a collective effort. Employers, employees, and regulatory bodies should collaborate to create a safe and healthy work environment, minimize exposure to pollutants, and promote worker well-being. Additionally, individuals can protect themselves by monitoring air quality, avoiding exposure to polluted air, using air purifiers, and advocating for policies that prioritize clean air and public health.

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