

Good morning Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about this important worker safety issue.

Yesterday was the 115th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, which is widely credited as being one of the early driving forces behind the workplace safety movement. This bill gives the state the opportunity to make another important step forward in worker safety.

We are lucky enough to live in a state that experiences the full range of seasons and this leads to a higher risk of worker injury due to the fluctuating of temperatures including risks from being exposed to high temperatures without acclimatization as well as extended periods of cold temperatures which lead to a whole range of temperature related injuries.

According to recent analysis published in 2025 and available on the NIH website, the risk of injury increased linearly with the increase in temperature for workers in high hazard industries across the united states, including in the Northeast. The risk of injury was increased by 22% in states that lacked occupational heat rules and the conclusion was that heat exposure increases the overall risk of work injury.

Elevated temperatures have been shown to impair hand-eye coordination, lead to muscular fatigue, and impair memory and judgement which also can lead to increases in other types of workplace injuries. Other studies such as one performed by UCLA have consistently shown higher risks of injury on days that have elevated heat index, contributing to more time away from work to recover from injuries. These injuries can have a lasting impact on the lives of the workers who suffer them, furthermore this impacts workers in other ways because they risk losing their employment and their ability to provide for their families. Most of these studies focus on days of 80 or higher on the heat index.

Vermont workers are at particular risk during periods of extremely high heat index because we simply don't exist in a world of consistently high temperatures. When the temperature skyrockets in the late spring, workers are not acclimatized to the heat and this leads to a high impact on Vermont workers. Workers who spend most or all of their workday outside of climate-controlled buildings are at higher risk.

Injuries from cold temperatures are also a risk in the state of Vermont because there is not standard that many employers are required to live up to. Our experience with representing workers in the warehouse industry is that the lack of standards creates a moral hazard that many employers are unable to resist. When workplaces fall below 32 degrees, vital safety equipment begins to fail in facilities which are not appropriately heated. Workers have encountered facilities that process hazardous materials with frozen eyewash stations, frozen emergency showers not to mention bathrooms without functioning sinks and water fountains. A lot of this could be prevented with basic requirements to heat all facilities to a reasonable temperature to keep vital equipment from freezing.

According to the GAO, older workers are working more hours than they ever have and recent years have seen peaks of up to 44.1 average hours worked for the average worker per week. Longer hours means more hours away from a heated environment which can lead to the same type of impairments and injuries that exposure to heat can lead to.

Studies have shown a real positive effect in states that have laws on the books to prevent temperature related injuries. The real question that we should be asking is, given that research has shown that these rules have shown a reduction in harm where they have been implemented, can we really afford to wait any longer to protect workers in the state?