

Rep. Adams Celebrates New Workforce Protections Against Heat Illness



From Rep. Adams Press <adams.press@mail2.housecommunications.gov>
To <sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org>
Reply-To <greg.nasif@mail.house.gov>
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Media Contacts: Greg Nasif, Press Secretary, 202-308-7055 |

Greg.Nasif@mail.house.gov

Media Spokesperson: Loan Lake, Communications Director, 202-308-9572 |

Lo'an.Lake@mail.house.gov



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Democratic Lawmakers had pushed legislation for OSHA to institute protections last year

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, **Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, Ph.D. (D-NC-12)**, Ranking Member of the Education & Workforce Committee (E&W)'s Subcommittee on Workforce Protections, is celebrating a slate of new heat protections for workers instituted by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a division of the Department of Labor under President Biden.

“The heat conditions that workers face are the worst we’ve seen in decades, and climate change will only continue to drive temperatures higher. Too many workers are exposed to dangerously hot conditions with few or no water or rest breaks. The Biden Administration has taken a historic step today in proposing a rule that would standardize heat protections nationally,” **said Rep. Adams**. “Too many lives have been lost due to preventable heat illness. We can do better by our workers, and this rule is an excellent step forward.”

The new rule represents progress in one of Rep. Adams’ signature policy focuses and is a timely solution following a recent heat wave that gripped much of the country. Last year, with Congresswoman Judy Chu (CA-28), E&W Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (VA-03), Congressman Raul Grijalva (AZ-07), she introduced the **Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness, Injury and Fatality Prevention Act**, to ensure the safety and health of workers who are exposed to dangerous heat conditions in the workplace. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA), and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), introduced identical companion legislation in the Senate. These lawmakers also [published a letter last July](#) urging the Biden-Harris Administration to finalize an OSHA rule protecting workers, like the one introduced today.

“Whether on a farm, driving a truck, or working in a warehouse, workers like Asunción keep our country running while enduring some of the most difficult conditions—often without access to water, shade, or rest” **said Rep. Chu**. “As we enter yet another dangerously hot summer, and as MAGA governors in Florida and Texas block any meaningful action at the local level to protect workers in their states from on-the-job risks from heat, President Biden and Acting Secretary Su are putting workers’ health and safety first by proposing a federal baseline of protections from heat. This is a major milestone, but Congress must still pass our bipartisan Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness and Fatality Prevention Act to give workers certainty that, as the climate crisis worsens extreme heat conditions, federal heat stress protections will be permanent.”

“Today, the Department of Labor took a crucial step forward in protecting America’s workers by advancing a proposed rule aimed at mitigating health risks associated with heat exposure. Extreme heat in the workplace is not just about being uncomfortable on a hot day. When combined with heavy workloads, clothing, and high humidity, excessive heat can lead to illnesses, injuries, and sometimes death. No worker should have to fear that they may not make it home to see their family,” **said Ranking Member Scott**. “The proposed rule requires employers to provide essential safeguards such as water, rest breaks, and shaded or cool rest areas. These measures are simple, yet critical, as increasingly extreme temperatures pose heightened risks to workers’ health and safety, particularly during the summer months.”

“Denial of climate change is no longer an option. Every summer record breaking heat is taking hold over our country, and while we’ve failed as a nation to take decisive action to prevent climate change, we must not fail at protecting people from its impacts,” **said Rep. Grijalva**. “I applaud the Biden administration for issuing this clearly needed labor standard to protect workers from the heat. I encourage them to move it forward with urgency, and adopt a strong final standard that reflects the reality of our future planet.”

“Heat protections are a matter of life and death for the millions of workers across the country doing backbreaking labor amid increasingly extreme temperatures,” **said Senator Padilla**. “With climate change shattering new heat records every summer, holding employers accountable to provide commonsense heat-stress protections like shade and water breaks has only become more important. I am thrilled to see OSHA act on our calls to put the health and safety of our workers first by proposing a federal heat standard that would prevent millions of heat-related illnesses and save lives.”

The proposed rule includes requirements for identifying heat hazards, developing heat illness and emergency response plans, providing training to employees and supervisors, and implementing work practice standards — including rest breaks, access to shade and cool water, and heat acclimatization for employees.

The legislation introduced last year was named in honor of Asunción Valdivia, who died in 2004 after picking grapes in California for ten hours straight in 105-degree temperatures. According to OSHA, excessive heat officially caused the deaths of 121 workers on the job between 2017 and 2022 — likely an undercount.

While there has not been a federal standard before these rules, similar requirements have been adopted by the State of California and have resulted in 30 percent fewer heat-related illnesses and injuries.

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Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, Ph.D. represents North Carolina's 12th Congressional District (Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, Cabarrus County) and serves on the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Education & the Workforce, where she serves as ranking member of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee.

Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, NC-12
2436 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515
Phone: 202-225-1510 Fax: 202-225-1512

Office of Congresswoman Alma Adams | 10815 David Taylor Dr., Suite 100 | Charlotte, NC 28262 US

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