



COMMUNICATIONS

May 26, 2015

Alert: California High Heat Regulations Now Call for Reliable Communications Equipment, Network

The use of two-way radios in an agricultural setting is well known to improve logistics efficiency and managerial oversight, but it just got even more appealing to those with safety and compliance in mind. Revisions to code in Title 8 establish a strong case for the use of two-way radios and their reliable networks in order to maintain compliance in high heat (95 degrees or warmer).

Title 8, Section 3395 lists measures that must be taken to protect agricultural workers from health hazards brought on by high heat. Many of the mandates are intuitive, such as specific guidelines for heat recovery times and access to fluids. Others aren't so obvious. For example, the code explicitly requires that employers ensure *"effective communication by voice, observation, or electronic means is maintained so that employees at the work site can contact a supervisor when necessary. An electronic device, such as a cell phone or text messaging device, may be used for this purpose only if reception in the area is reliable."*

It's common for agricultural sites to be beyond the normal footprint of cellular service, to say nothing of capacity in an emergency. We all know of cases in which the lack of service inhibited emergency response and the industry is well aware of the liability this presents.

The means of communication are also addressed in a subsection on "emergency response procedures" requiring *"effective communication by voice, observation, or electronic means is maintained so that employees at the work site can contact a supervisor or emergency medical services when necessary. An electronic device, such as a cell phone or text messaging device, may be used for this purpose only if reception in the area is reliable. If an electronic device will not furnish reliable communication in the work area, the employer will ensure a means of summoning emergency medical services."*

The new rules are expected to prompt an increase in the use of two-way radio equipment in the field, in part because the benefits extend far beyond safety, says Silke's Andy Kittel. "Radio improves coordination, which improves productivity and efficiency. Combine that with the direct safety benefits and you have exactly what's needed in most agricultural settings. This legislation will probably help the industry re-discover what a great tool radio can be."

This isn't the first time consumer wireless devices in the workplace have been considered from a safety point of view. The dangers posed by the distraction devices are well understood. Radio is an appealing option because of the "pure work" nature of the technology. "Radio appeals to organizations who want to eliminate distractions from the workplace, both for the sake of safety and to improve productivity," Kittel reports.

For more information about the high-heat regulations, visit <https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3395.html>.