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Labor & Workforce Development Agency

Labor Agency and Migrant Education Program Partner to Prevent Heat Illness in Agricultural Industry

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Sacramento – Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) Secretary Victoria Bradshaw and Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell today announced a partnership that will bring heat illness prevention information to California’s migrant education community.

“California’s ground-breaking heat illness prevention regulations have helped reduce the number of heat illnesses since 2005,” Bradshaw said. “This collaboration will put potentially life-saving information into the hands of migrant students and their parents to help keep them safe in the fields.”

“We are here today as part of a joint effort to raise awareness in the migrant farm worker community about the dangers of heat illness and the steps that can be taken to prevent it,” O’Connell said. “The California Department of Education is dedicated to sharing information with migrant families through our migrant education program, parent advisory councils and summer school programs. No job is worth ill health or worse, a life. It’s important workers are aware of the danger signs so they know when to seek relief.”

Under the partnership, LWDA’s Department of Industrial Relations’ Division of Occupational Safety and Health, also known as Cal/OSHA, will work with migrant education teachers and administrators throughout the state to educate students and their families about heat stress and their rights.

Heat illness prevention materials in multiple languages will be distributed widely within the migrant education community, and various presentations by Cal/OSHA’s consultation staff will be made throughout the 23 regions of the state’s migrant education program. Cal/OSHA consultants will also be making presentations at the March 2009 migrant education state parent conference.

The labor agency and its Department of Industrial Relations have also taken the following steps to protect workers from heat illness:

- Conducted 380 heat illness seminars so far this year compared to 284 for all of 2007. Cal/OSHA is also on pace to exceed the number of heat illness prevention inspections, with 659 heat-related inspections to date in 2008 compared to 1,018 for all of 2007.
- Partnered with California growers to jointly conduct supplemental heat illness training sessions for farm labor contractors.

- Mailed 106,261 employers with outdoor operations letters reminding them of their responsibilities under the heat illness regulations. Four-page, easy-to-read newsletters on heat illness in English and Spanish were included as enclosures.
- Provided heat illness prevention messages to TV meteorologists statewide
- Partnered with the Catholic Diocese of Fresno to conduct outreach workshops for agricultural workers.
- Conducted more than 60 media interviews about heat illness in multiple languages
- Distributed a series of heat illness prevention public service announcements to radio stations statewide in seven languages
- Hosted heat illness prevention conference calls to employers statewide

“We are working with the agricultural industry to make sure all their supervisors and employees are properly trained to recognize the symptoms of heat illness and how to respond to it,” Bradshaw said. “At the same time, our inspectors are out in the fields working diligently to enforce the training, water and shade required in heat illness regulations

Under Governor Schwarzenegger's leadership, California became the first state in the nation to develop a safety and health regulation addressing heat illness in 2005. Cal/OSHA issued permanent heat illness prevention regulations to protect outdoor workers in 2006.

Employers are required to take four basic steps to prevent heat illness at all outdoor worksites. These include developing and implementing written procedures on heat illness prevention, and providing heat illness training to all employees--especially those who are not proficient in the English language.

In addition, employers must provide their employees readily accessible, clean and cool drinking water and ample shade or cooling areas.

For more information on heat illness prevention and training materials, visit the Cal/OSHA Web site at www.dir.ca.gov/heatillness. Employees with work-related questions or complaints may call the California Workers' Information Hotline at 1-866-924-9757.