

Know the warning signs for sun and heat

Most letter carriers enjoy working outdoors instead of being cooped up in an office. But working outside in the summer brings potential hazards, and carriers need to protect themselves from the dangers associated with heat and sun.

“Letter carriers need to understand the risks of sun exposure and hot weather, take proactive measures to avoid them, and know the signs of trouble,” NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. said. “Working alone means you have to take responsibility for your own safety and make it your first priority.”

Being physically fit or tough-minded isn’t enough—letter carriers need to take care of their body’s needs and prepare in advance. All carriers must be wary of extreme heat, especially those who have not acclimatized to the conditions, whether because they have been on leave or are a new hire. Knowing how to prevent heat stress is key to keeping a letter carrier safe on a hot day.

Water is the first line of defense. Hydration is essential to the body’s natural cooling process. Drinking plenty of H₂O long before you leave the office is the first step in heat safety. Continue to drink about 8 ounces every 15 minutes while in the heat, and even afterward, to replace vital body fluids. Check with your doctor on the best way to replenish your electrolytes.

The other essential part of preparing to survive the heat is dressing for the weather. Wear loose-fitting, breathable clothing to allow your skin to cool itself. Choose light-colored fabric because it reflects sunlight better and keeps you cooler. Even if your body is cool, you need a hat too—studies have shown that sun exposure



can cause brain dysfunction just by heating your head.

On your route, make a plan for places to take refuge if you overheat. Look for shady areas and air-conditioned public spaces you can use to cool down, especially at midday.

Even if you take all of these precautions, heat stress can catch up with you, so know the signs. You should be prepared to recognize the two kinds of severe heat stress:

- **Heat exhaustion** symptoms include headache, nausea, dizziness, weakness, thirst and heavy sweating. You should call for medical help before this becomes a heat stroke.
- **Heat stroke** is the most serious heat-related illness and requires immediate medical attention. Call 911 immediately and, if possible, have someone contact your supervisor. Do not wait for your supervisor’s approval to call 911. Symptoms include confusion; fainting; seizures; very high body

temperature; hot, dry skin; and profuse sweating. The visible signs of heat stroke are red, hot, dry skin, or excessive sweating, seizures and fainting.

Take action immediately when you recognize the signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke, whether in yourself or in a colleague. Find shade or a cool place indoors, drink water, and call 911 immediately. Then notify your supervisor if you can.

To help outdoor workers, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have jointly developed a heat safety tool app for your smartphone. Once the app is installed, it can detect your location and provide you with the current temperature, humidity and heat index—the combination of temperature and humidity that tells you how difficult will be for your body to cool itself. The app also will provide the expected heat index for the day so you can plan for it.

Heat isn't the only threat the sun brings. Even when the air isn't hot, sunlight can severely damage your skin. Sunburn can cause extreme discomfort, but even if you don't burn, long-term sun exposure brings the risk of skin cancer. Even on cool or cloudy days, letter carriers should take precautions daily to minimize the risk of both sunburn and long-term skin damage from cumulative exposure to the sun's rays.

"Skin damage due to long-term exposure can be a serious problem later

in life," Peralta said. "Protect yourself every day so it doesn't add up."

Use a strong sunscreen, even on cloudy days, on all exposed skin, and reapply as needed. Consider the sun protection factor (SPF) of the sunscreen you use. SPF is a multiplier of how long the sunscreen allows you to go in the sun without burning. For example, on a sunny day when you might suffer a sunburn in 15 minutes with no protection, a sunscreen rated at SPF 30 would protect you for seven hours—as long as sweat doesn't wash it away sooner. Be-

cause it wears off, even without sweat, in two hours or so, carry sunscreen with you and reapply as needed.

When you can, wear appropriate clothes to cover as much of your skin as possible. Remember that the sun's rays can go through some types of fabric, so consider wearing uniform items made for sun protection and applying sunscreen under a shirt or hat just to be safe.

"Stay safe from heat and sun this summer," Peralta said, "and look out for each other." **PR**

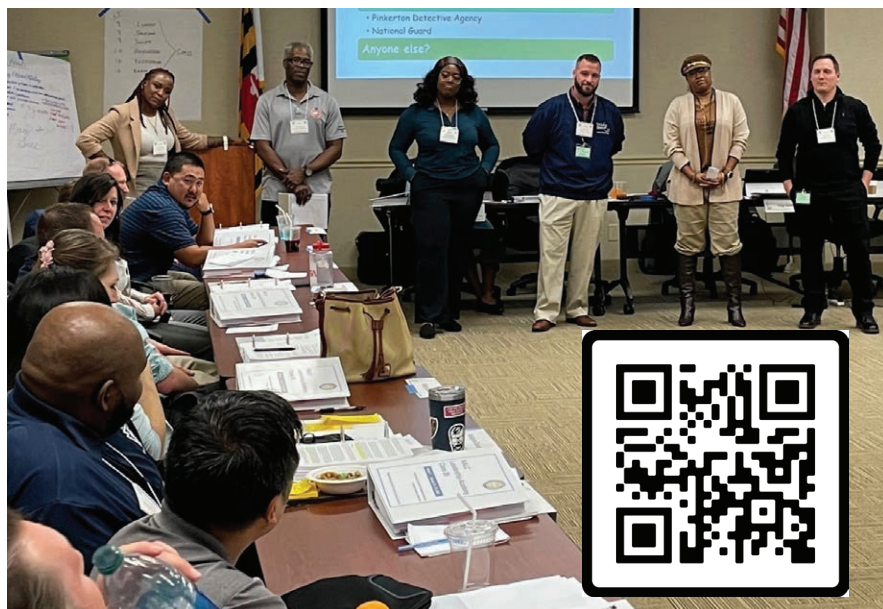
Apply for the 2024 NALC Leadership Academy

NALC is now accepting applications for the 2024 Leadership Academy, which is open to all active NALC members.

The Leadership Academy consists of three weeklong sessions held over a five-month period at the Maritime Institute near Baltimore, MD. During the classes, students discuss effective leadership skills and the union's legislative agenda. They learn about topics such as the Dispute Resolution Process, strategic planning, branch financial responsibilities, retirement issues, route protection, workers' compensation, effective negotiation techniques, and communicating through traditional and social media.

Students are required to complete outside learning projects after returning home following Weeks 1 and 2. Upon graduation, each student will spend a fourth week working in their national business agent's office.

The Academy curriculum is designed to both develop and enhance the knowledge and skills that are essential for NALC leaders. In addition to the



Leadership Academy staff, each of the resident national officers, as well as many Headquarters staff members, help teach at the Academy, providing students with NALC's top experts in each field. Currently, five resident officers, 12 national business agents, 23 regional administrative assistants,

and 34 Headquarters and regional staff members, along with hundreds of state and branch representatives, are graduates of the NALC Leadership Academy.

Applications are available on nalc.org or by scanning the QR code above and will be accepted through Friday, Sept. 15. **PR**