Keep Your Cool

Tackling Heat Stress At Work

An Advice Guide for
Usdaw Members

USDAW
HEALTH & SAFETY

Too Hot for Comfort?

The law says your employer must maintain a reasonable temperature in your workplace.*

It doesn't specify a maximum reasonable temperature, but employers are expected to take steps to deal with situations where the temperature is uncomfortably high.

The effects of heat depend on a variety of factors such as air temperature, heat sources, humidity, physical exertion, etc. Together these contribute toward a workers 'thermal comfort'.

Information on Thermal Comfort can be found on the HSEs website: **www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm**

Experts say the comfort zone is normally in the region of 16°C to 24°C. As the temperature rises above this zone, heat exhaustion starts. People start to suffer loss of concentration, there are increases in accidents and loss of productivity. Symptoms include irritability, dizzyness, headaches, nausea and fainting.

Sweating also can cause problems. You can lose as much as two pints of water an hour through sweating. If fluids and salt are not replaced nausea, vomiting and muscle cramps can occur. Prolonged sweating can cause skin rashes and blocked pores (or 'prickly heat').

If your body temperature gets too high, heat stroke can occur. Research has shown that people who are not used to high temperatures can only work for an hour or so at temperatures of 40°C before collapsing, even when the work involves no physical effort.

Cool It!

Where high temperatures are a common problem for much of the working time (for example, in kitchens, bakeries, etc.) there are things employers can do to reduce the heat.

Insulating or Removing Heat Sources

Identifying the main sources of heat and either shielding them or removing them altogether will stop the problem at source. When buying new equipment employers should think about the heat it will generate in use.

Improving Ventilation

Simply increasing the circulation of fresh air can help with some problems. In kitchen areas, for example, good extraction will carry away steam and hot air and draw in cooler air. In more serious cases air-conditioning plants may be needed to bring down the temperature of the air. Ventilation and air-conditioning equipment needs to be regularly maintained and cleaned to make sure it is safe and effective.

*Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, Reg.7.

Temporary Measures

Where problems may occur occasionally (for example, during spells of exceptionally warm weather) or when air-conditioning equipment fails, there are still things which can help.

Fans can help to get the air moving but are less effective in very hot and humid conditions. Portable or temporary air-conditioning units can be hired. Wherever temporary equipment is used don't forget about electrical safety, trailing cables, etc.

Provision of cold drinks can help people cool down and replace fluid. More frequent rest breaks away from the hot area or job rotation to limit time spent in the hot area can also help. Relaxation of dress or uniform codes, for example, letting people work in shirt sleeves, not insisting that women wear tights or men wear ties, can also help.

Usdaw believes that temperatures above 24°C begin to get unreasonably warm. Where they occur employers should take steps to reduce the temperature or to make things more comfortable.

Join the Union

If you want better health and safety conditions where you work, make sure you're in Usdaw: **www.usdaw.org.uk/join**

What Can You Do?

- Under the law, there must be enough thermometers around the workplace for you to determine the temperature where you work.
- If it gets too hot where you work, raise it with management. A good manager will listen to complaints and act on them. Even simple steps like providing cold drinks will help to show that management are sympathetic.
- If your employer recognises the Union, your local Safety Representative can use their legal powers to investigate the problem and take it up with management to get improvements.
- If you work for an employer who does not recognise the Union, there may be less Usdaw can do to help.

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- Calling in the enforcement authorities may help (Health and Safety Executive for factories, Environmental Health Officers for offices or shops). But the fact that there is no maximum temperature in the law may limit what they can do.
- High temperatures at work can make life a misery and can damage your health. They can be controlled more effectively where the Union is recognised and organised.

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Temperature Conversion Chart

Centigrade	Fahrenheit
0	32
10	50
20	68
30	86
40	104
50	122

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: **www.usdaw.org.uk**
You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

Join Usdaw

You can join online at:
www.usdaw.org.uk/join

Scan to join today

What Happens Next

Once we process your application, you will receive a membership card with our Helpline telephone number and a New Member's Pack giving details of all the benefits and professional services available to you.

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