



The Campaign to Combat Workplace Heat

Does your boss need to 'Cool it'?

Campaign Statement

The 'Cool it' Campaign has been launched to highlight and tackle the problem of high temperatures in workplaces. We feel that workers should not be forced to endure high temperatures without adequate measures being taken by the employer to control the effect of heat. The Campaign therefore calls for the government to provide clear, coherent and enforceable requirements for employers about how to combat heat in the workplace - including the introduction of

a maximum working temperature of around 30°C and 27°C

for those doing strenuous work. Once the temperature reaches the maximum limit, then control measures must be implemented to reduce the heat and/or the effect of the heat on their employees. We call for the increased surveillance and enforcement by the Health and Safety Executive in this area. We need clear legislation which is easy to enforce and in which employers understand their obligations and employees understand their rights.

Have you experienced being too hot at work? Has this meant that you felt dizzy, drowsy, irritable or uncomfortable? Maybe you feel that it is connected to more serious medical issues? Well you are one of the many workers who are forced to endure unreasonable workplace heat.

Whilst some employers do take measures to ensure a 'reasonable' working temperature (as required under UK law) our experiences prove that this can vary greatly from employer to employer leading to an ad-hoc approach across the country. It is usually accepted that people work best at a temperature between 16°C and 24°C. Previous wording used by the Health and Safety Executive refers to '*an acceptable zone of thermal comfort...between 13°C (56°F) and 30°C (86°F).*'

The 2006 the TUC Safety Representatives' Survey revealed one in three (34 per cent) safety representatives cited high or low temperatures as one of their top concerns. Anecdotal Information suggests that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) receives frequent complaints about workplace heat and yet, the HSE's activity in this area is very limited. Heat is a problem in workplaces and the current enforcement framework is not working!

"The lack of a solid legal framework makes it difficult for us, as a trade union, to protect our members and leads to vast inconsistencies across the country."

Ronnie Draper, General Secretary, BFAWU

Get Involved in the 'Cool it' Campaign by emailing ronnie.draper@bfawu.org

Supported by



which brings together ten national unions - BFAWU, FBU, NAPO, NUJ, NUT, PCS, POA, RMT, UCU and URTU - to co-ordinate campaigning activities.



Health Effects of Heat in the Workplace

There is a danger in underestimating both the short and long term psychological and physical effects of regular exposure to heat. The effects of high temperatures on employees are very serious.

If people get too hot, they risk **dizziness**, **fainting**, or even **heat cramps**. Particularly for those doing manual work, high temperature can even have very **severe physical effects** - fatigue, extra strain on the heart and lungs, dizziness and fainting, heat cramps due to loss of water and salt. Hot, dry air can increase the risk of **eye and throat infections**, and **breathing problems** such as asthma and rhinitis.

However even at lower temperatures heat leads to a loss of concentration and increased tiredness, which means that workers are more likely to put themselves or others at risk. Workplace heat can cause an increase in the likelihood of **accidents** due to reduced concentration. Heat can also **aggravate other medical conditions** and illnesses such as **high blood pressure** or **heart disease** due to increased load on the heart as well as interacting with, or increasing the effect of, other workplace hazards.

More extensive research needs to be done to investigate the long term impact of daily exposure to heat.

"Staff have no control because we can't open windows or get fans or heaters. Often we are told no because of wires being across the floor"
Rachel Pointer

"I am just one of the many people who have genuine throat and nasal problems working on this plant. It is too hot. I wake up the next day with a limited speaking and singing range, suffer extreme dryness of throat whilst on the plant and easily get a blocked nose and headaches."
Seema Patel

"Headaches were common place as was a general discomfort and malaise. Staff tried their best to find jobs that took them into fresh air. We had to go out and buy fans and eventually we got a water dispenser. The Local Authority was uninterested and we only got the improvements because our boss was also suffering and was a decent person."
Presley Jones

A recent trade union survey of almost 6,000 teachers, school and college leaders and Health and Safety Representatives, found that 94% of respondents reported that they had worked in excessively high temperatures during the summer.

A union representative reported on a survey of twenty seven telephone exchanges. The temperatures ranged from the lowest at 21°C increasing to 36°C. The average reported temperature was 28.64°C and 76% of the buildings were over the WHO recommended standard.

The 2009 Usdaw survey revealed that 72% of respondents said that thermometers were not available in the workplace to allow workers to monitor the temperature (an apparent breach of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations). Of those who asked for thermometers 27% were refused.

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