



Working in Hot Weather / Environments – Managers Q & A

What does the law say about maximum temperatures?

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess risks to protect employee's health and safety. There is no specific maximum temperature as what is "reasonable" will depend on the nature of the work carried out.

What is hazardous about the Heat?

At high temperatures e.g., 25°C and above the atmosphere can become heavy. Staff can become sleepy and less aware of dangers to themselves. There is an increased risk of accidents due to slips, trips, falls, poor manual handling and injury from hand tools etc.

Thermal discomfort gives rise to reduced efficiency which can lead to poor decision making with resultant process errors.

Heat Exhaustion can occur in sedentary as well as manual work. It occurs because of inadequate fluid intake to replace fluids lost by sweating. Fluid imbalance gives rise to nausea, light headedness, and general weakness with an elevated temperature. If untreated it may lead to fainting and possibly heat stroke.

Heat Stroke is a life-threatening condition where the body loses the ability to control its own temperature. It can arise from untreated heat exhaustion or be due to conditions of high humidity. In very humid conditions sweat cannot evaporate from the skin so the body cannot cool itself effectively.

Who is likely to be High Risk?

The following is a non-exhaustive list of persons likely to be at high risk of heat injury in hot weather or hot environments:

- Kitchen Staff
- Highway workers
- Maintenance Staff
- Outdoor staff such as Gardeners
- Staff using personal protective equipment e.g., breathing apparatus; respirators; impermeable protective over clothing

Certain Service Users / Clients / Visitors may also be at risk from hot weather:

- Elderly residents in residential Homes;
- Vulnerable Adults in the community;
- Young Children

What are the precautions?

- If possible do not go out in the sun. Change the time of day of the job, so that it's done at a cooler time of day for example, before 11am or after 3pm. Supervisors need to look critically about what can and cannot be achieved.
- Provide frequent breaks in a cool environment away from the sun and sources of heat such as cooking equipment and other heating processes.
- Provide the best ventilation that you can with opening of windows, fans, and air conditions (if available).
- Close the curtains or blinds to keep the glare of the sun out especially overnight, during the day this is a balance between letting the air in and keeping the room cool.
- If the working environment cannot be modified then suntan lotion with an SPF (Sun Protection Factor) of at least 30 should be provided, hats and neck protection and "refuges" should be provided where breaks can be taken e.g., provision of shaded areas.
- If clothing is not considered safety critical, consider relaxing the dress code to allow staff to wear loose fitting, light, summer clothing.
- A drinking water supply must be provided. Persons carrying out manual labour in a hot environment should drink 8 pints per day and a further pint for every hour worked. The importance of regular drinking of water should be stressed to staff.
- Personal protective equipment should be specially designed for work in hot environments. For example, light coloured loose fitting/absorbent over clothing. If the over-clothing has to be impermeable for example to protect against chemicals consideration should be given to the need for means of cooling.

It is appreciated that not all departments will be able to implement all of the above precautions, but all managers can make risk based decisions on what is the best that they can possibly do for their service.