Temperature Control in Buildings Used as Workplaces and Hot Weather Working

Introduction

The following describes basic standards and legal requirements regarding workplace temperature limits. Managers will need to decide locally on the balance of risk, comfort and needs of the service, what preventative and palliative steps can be taken for the comfort of staff and service users.

Temperature

Human perceptions of and capacity for heat and cold differ substantially from one individual to another. This variety is compounded by the fact that our “sense” that a room is hot does not just come from the air temperature in the room. The human body cools itself mostly through the evaporation of sweat. The faster the evaporation, the more quickly heat can be taken from the body. What affects the speed of this evaporation apart from the air temperature is the amount of water vapour (humidity) in the air and the speed at which the air travels.

The Law on Workplace Temperature

Regulation 7 of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 requires employers to ensure that temperatures in workplaces should be 'reasonable' although it does not specify a maximum reasonable temperature.

Minimum Temperatures

1. There is a minimum temperature of 16^{o}C places of work in which sedentary work is undertaken. This drops to 13^{o}C for workplaces in which the work is physically active. This does not apply to rooms in which it would be impractical to achieve them (cold storage facilities, loading bays etc.)

Maximum Temperatures

2. There is no statutory maximum working temperature in the workplace
There is a legal requirement that:

a) Workplace temperatures will be ‘reasonable’ inside workplaces whilst they are occupied.

b) Thermometers should be provided to enable the temperature in the workplace to be monitored.

The Law on Workplace Ventilation

1. There is no explicit statutory requirement to provide fans, air conditioning or air cooling. But there is a requirement to take **reasonable steps** to achieve a reasonably comfortable temperature.

2. There is a requirement to make provision for all enclosed workplaces to be ventilated by sufficient quantities of fresh or purified air. This may be built in ventilation, the opening of windows, use of air conditioning, extract ventilation, or a combination of these.

3. Compliance can be achieved in many cases through the use of windows or other openings but where necessary mechanical ventilation systems should be provided as appropriate.

4. The British Standard for fresh air ventilation in places of sedentary work is 5 litres of fresh air per person per second (8 litres in Educational premises).

You will comply with the law if, when the temperature in a particular workroom or workplace is not reasonably comfortable or the ventilation is inadequate, you take **reasonable steps** to achieve a comfortable temperature or make the ventilation effective and suitable.

Such steps might include:

- Use of blinds/curtains to reduce solar heating
- Installation of heat reflecting film to windows
- Ensuring easy access to drinking water as required
- Opening of windows/doors/skylights to increase natural ventilation.
- Operation and maintenance of any existing installed cooling systems (extraction ventilation/air conditioning)
- Provision of additional cooling devices such as fans or portable air conditioning units (subject to consideration of the risks of electrical overload and consequent fire or loss of power).
- Relaxation of dress codes (within accepted workplace norms)
- Change of work patterns to allow more frequent breaks
- Switching off any unnecessary power sources – OHPs/PCs.
- Installation of permanent mechanical ventilation equipment
- Moving people away from windows
- Moving persons from the room or workplace e.g. move to other vacant accommodation on North side of premises; work from home, etc.

- Consideration for additional cooling installation in areas which are regularly and consistently beyond reasonably comfortable temperatures.

Risk and Comfort

Managers need to be careful to address areas of high risk, maximum discomfort and minor discomfort proportionately. The real health risks above and beyond discomfort and its associated stress are in dehydration and heat exhaustion. These are highly unlikely amongst fit, adult office-based workers whose work is sedentary and who are not compelled by work to be exposed to very hot conditions on a continuous basis without recourse to breaks, water and movement around and outside the building. In general, adult members of staff undertaking work in normal premises are likely to feel discomfort rather than experience ill-health.

For example, a Nursery class in older less well insulated classrooms*, is much more likely to suffer actual ill-health than office staff who have more control over their environment, work activity and can more easily re-hydrate themselves in hot conditions.
**See specific note on Educational Workplace Temperatures below*.

Managers should be aware of the differing abilities of groups of people, especially the young or elderly to withstand high temperatures or to act independently to prevent injury. Managers must be sensitive to the increased risks to staff who may suffer from illness affected by heat or cold.

Managers will know the parts of their buildings which heat up to unsatisfactory levels and the groups of staff and service users who will be most at risk and should address management effort and resources accordingly.

Staff only Workplaces

In sites where staff have little or no contact with service users and no further reasonable steps can be taken to achieve a reasonably comfortable temperature, managers may wish to consider authorising staff to work from home if appropriate, or to move to other available accommodation in which conditions are known to be cooler.

Educational Workplace Temperatures

There are no legal lower or upper temperature limits for schools, but workplace temperatures must be kept 'reasonable'. See **The Law on Workplace Temperature** above**.** Schools must follow the same health and safety law for indoor temperature as other workplaces.

The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 used to state minimum temperatures in educational settings. These were replaced on 31 October 2012 by

the School Premises (England) Regulations 2012. These regulations do not specify minimum temperatures for any parts of a school.

- ***Despite removal of this regulation, the NEU position remains that temperatures in school classrooms should be at least 18ºC (64.4ºF)***

Where there may be concerns around thermal comfort, they should be raised with the Headteacher through the School's Health and Safety representative. Although there is no legal maximum temperature in UK law, the NEU believes that because of the nature of the way in which teachers work, and the presence of children, a maximum indoor working temperature of 26°C is appropriate.

Schools should monitor the temperature in classrooms using a thermometer. A sufficient number of thermometers should be available, at a convenient distance from any part of the workplace, to enable temperatures to be measured in any part of the workplace. Try not to place thermometers directly next to windows or heaters. Schools do not require a thermometer to be provided in every room. The aim is to provide a reasonable temperature for staff and pupils in appropriate areas

The DfEE produced guidance in 1997, revised in 2003, about construction standards for heat gain. The recommended classroom design temperature is 23ºC with a swing of not more than 4ºC in either direction.

Nevertheless, this guidance does recognise the likelihood of temperatures in excess of this in hot summers by indicating that it is undesirable for peak temperatures to exceed 28ºC on more than 10 days of the summer term. If there are classrooms regularly exceeding this when all other reasonable measures have been taken, it is logical for managers to treat these rooms as a priority for remedial action.

Exposure to Direct Sunlight

Managers of staff working outside in direct sunlight should already have in place risk assessments and appropriate controls for those staff. Periods of unusually high temperatures merit a check by managers that precautions specified by the assessments are in place.

Any events held outside should be risk assessed and appropriate measures taken to ensure adequate levels of sun protection and re-hydration, especially for more vulnerable persons such as children or older people.

It should be remembered that by changing the time and/or physical location of events by just a small margin, much better use can be made of natural shade and the cooler parts of the day.

Where can I get further information?

- Workplace health, safety and welfare. Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. Approved Code of Practice and guidance. http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l24.htm
- Health and Safety Executive - FAQ's http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/faq.htm

- Shropshire Council's General Ventilation Arrangement available on the Intranet and SLG

For advice or assistance please contact:
Property Services Group 01743 281079
Enquiries.psg@shropshire.gov.uk
Health & Safety Team: (01743) 252819
Health.safety@shropshire.gov.uk

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