

High temperatures in the workplace: A Growing Challenge for Employers

August 2024



As summer 2024 unfolds, the UK has seen a mix of weather extremes, from torrential rains to scorching heatwaves. With increasingly hotter summers becoming the norm, managing high temperatures in the workplace is now a critical issue for employers.

While short-term solutions may help mitigate the immediate risks of a heatwave, businesses must consider the broader implications of climate change and develop long-term strategies to maintain safe and comfortable working environments.

Understanding your legal obligations

Although the UK has no specific maximum working temperature law, employers are legally required to provide a safe and healthy working environment under the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#). This obligation extends to protecting employees from excessive heat, whether they are working on-site or from home.

The [Workplace \(Health, Safety, and Welfare\) Regulations 1992](#) further mandate that employers ensure reasonable temperatures in all indoor workplaces. What constitutes a "reasonable" temperature varies, though, depending on the work activity and environmental conditions.

Employers must assess risks related to workplace temperature, treating heat as a hazard with the same legal obligations as any other. Special consideration is required for vulnerable groups, such as pregnant workers, new mothers, and employees with health conditions or disabilities that could be exacerbated by extreme heat. If a risk cannot be mitigated, employers must allow affected employees to leave the workplace with full pay until it is safe to return.

The complexities of workplace temperature management

[Karen Cole](#), Head of Employment at RIAA Barker Gillette UK, explains, "The real challenge for employers is the lack of a universal standard for what constitutes 'too hot' in the workplace. Risk assessments must be tailored to the specific circumstances of each business. Factors such as the nature of the work, physical demands, and individual employee characteristics all play a role."

In workplaces that naturally generate heat, like bakeries or foundries, higher temperatures may be acceptable with proper protections in place. Those same temperatures could, however, be hazardous in office or retail settings. The Health and Safety Executive has consistently urged employers to protect workers during extreme heat, and there have been calls from MPs for legislation to enforce a maximum workplace temperature.

Proactive strategies for employers

Employers are encouraged to take a proactive approach to managing workplace temperatures. "The sensible approach is to identify and address heat-related risks before the temperatures rise," says Karen Cole. "Employers should listen to their employees and work collaboratively to develop long-term strategies for a safe and healthy work environment. Regularly updating policies and ensuring that everyone understands their rights during hot weather is crucial."

Effective measures to beat the heat

To help manage high temperatures, employers can implement several control measures, including:

- Installing adequate ventilation or air conditioning systems
- Providing access to cool drinking water
- Ensuring workstations are away from direct sunlight or heat-generating machinery
- Offering more frequent breaks
- Creating cooler rest areas
- Adjusting work schedules to cooler times of the day
- Relaxing dress codes during heatwaves
- Providing cooling equipment, such as fans or cooling vests, where appropriate

Conclusion

As temperatures continue to rise, the challenges for employers will only increase. By taking a proactive, informed approach, businesses can ensure the safety and wellbeing of their employees while staying compliant with legal obligations.

For expert advice, tailored information, and industry-specific policies, contact [Karen Cole](#) at RIAA Barker Gillette UK today.

Karen Cole
020 7299 6909
karen.cole@riaabg.com
www.riaabarkergillette.com



Note: This article is not legal advice; it provides information of general interest about current legal issues.

