



HOTTER SUMMERS ON THE WAY?

Suggestions for keeping employees cooler during a heatwave.

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With Wimbledon in full swing we know that summer is here! However this heat is not welcome by everyone. Workplaces can become increasingly uncomfortable and potentially dangerous places to work.

A recent report by the TUC said that as we know employees are not expected to work when the temperature drops below 16 degrees C or 13 degrees C for physically demanding work. Surprisingly there are no similar restrictions for when the workplace becomes too hot.

The TUC would like to see a change in the law so that employers are forced to act when the temperature inside reaches 24 degrees C. In addition staff could be sent home and employers prosecuted if the temperature reached 30 degrees (or 27 degrees for those engaged in physically demanding work). This can result in employees suffering heat rashes, headaches, dizzy spells, fainting and heat cramps. "Stifling hot conditions also affect concentration, making workers feel tired and as a result more likely to endanger their own or their colleagues' safety," the report suggests.

With a rise in temperatures employers should be doing all they can to make conditions bearable. Allowing employees to dress down will prevent them from overheating. Clearly vest tops and shorts are not suitable for all front line staff but those not dealing with the public should be able to discard tights, ties and suits and opt for more summery clothing. Dressing down can be the most effective solution and the TUC also recommends that bosses should only stop staff from wearing shorts to work if they have first carried out a proper risk assessment, and only people whose job could prove hazardous should still be made to work in long trousers.

To keep work cool, the TUC would like to see employers:

- allow staff to adopt less formal attire - with jackets and ties out, and short sleeves, vest tops and shorts in;
- distribute fans to staff and provide portable air cooling cabinets;
- install air conditioning and maintain it regularly, so that it doesn't break down during a heatwave;
- allow flexible working so that staff can have the option of coming in earlier and staying later to avoid the sweltering conditions of the rush hour commute;
- move desks away from windows, draw blinds or install reflective film; and,
- allow staff to take frequent breaks and provide a ready supply of cool drinks.

Can we take action now before the impact of potential climate change is felt when summers may become even hotter?

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