

WORKING TEMPERATURES

GMB London Region takes seriously its commitment to ensure the highest possible standards of health and safety practices within all workplaces. Members should feel safe at work and feel confident and supported to raise any concerns they may have about health & safety issues.

Health & safety at work legislation exists to protect workers from avoidable risk and to minimise the risk of harm. Nobody should be harmed or injured at work or suffer long-term health problems because of their work.

Being a member of GMB means that together we can continue to improve health and safety within all workplaces and be part of a positive culture regarding health & safety issues.

Working in cold temperatures

The Approved Code of Practice on the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations suggests the minimum temperature for working indoors should normally be at least:

- 16°C or
- 13°C if much of the work involves rigorous physical effort

Working in hot temperatures

- There's no law for maximum working temperature, or when it's too hot to work, because every workplace is different.
- No meaningful upper limit can be imposed because in many indoor workplaces high temperatures are not seasonal but created by work activity, for example in bakeries or foundries.

However, employers must stick to health and safety at work law, including:

- keeping the temperature at a comfortable level
- Providing clean and fresh air

How to protect workers:

- Workers should talk to their employer if the workplace temperature isn't comfortable.
- Find out about making workers feel more comfortable.

If your job involves extreme temperatures

In some workplaces extreme temperatures can be created by the work activity, such as some manufacturing processes. These temperatures can lead to serious health effects if not managed effectively.

You can find advice if you are working in very high or low temperatures, for example on heat stress, dehydration or cold stress from the HSE website.

What the law says

- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations require employers to provide a reasonable indoor temperature in the workplace.

- This depends on the work activity and the environmental conditions.
- The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations require reasonable workplace temperatures for indoor areas of construction sites.
- Where the site is outdoors, the employer must provide protection from adverse weather.
- Site rest facilities must also be maintained at an appropriate temperature.

Assessing the risks

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, employers must:

- Assess the risks to workers
- Put controls in place to protect them

Temperature in the workplace is one of the risks that should assess whether the work is being done indoors or outdoors.

The employer should consult with workers or their representatives on the best ways to cope with high or low temperatures.

However, all workers are entitled to an environment where risks to their health and safety are properly controlled. Heat is classed as a hazard and comes with legal obligations like any other hazard.

What is a reasonable working temperature?

The employer must decide what a reasonable temperature should be in your workplace.

Assess the risk

The employer must act on any findings by putting controls in place, including temporary or seasonal ones. A heat stress checklist should be carried out if workers are at risk from extreme temperatures

Managing workplace temperatures

This page explains the responsibilities of an employer and suggests ways they should manage the temperature in your workplace to protect workers.

How you manage the effects of temperature depends on:

- Whether the workplace is indoors or outdoors
- The normal operating temperature of that environment
- Indoor workplaces

An employer must provide:

- A reasonable working temperature in workrooms – usually at least 16°C, or 13°C for strenuous work.
- Local heating or cooling (using fans, opening windows, using radiators) where a comfortable temperature cannot be maintained throughout each workroom, such as in hot and cold manufacturing processes
- Rest facilities where necessary, e.g. for hot work or warm clothing in cold stores

- Heating systems which do not give off dangerous or offensive levels of fume into the workplace

When people are too hot

Help to ensure employees are comfortable in warm conditions:

- Employers should look to provide fans, such as desks, pedestal or ceiling-mounted ones
- Employers should look to have air-cooling or air-conditioning and adequate ventilation
- Ensure windows can be opened to keep air circulating
- Shade employees from direct sunlight with blinds or by using reflective film on windows
- Position workstations away from direct sunlight or sources of heat
- Place insulation materials around hot plant and pipes
- Employers should provide cold water dispensers (water is better than caffeine or carbonated drinks)
- Employers can also change work arrangements to avoid people getting too hot:
- Employers can Introduce flexible working patterns, such as job rotation, moving workers to cooler parts of the building where possible
- Employers can allow enough breaks to allow workers to get cold drinks or cool down
- Employers can Relax formal dress codes – but make sure personal protective equipment is used if required

When people are too cold

Practical steps the employer can take to keep people as comfortable as possible when working in the cold:

- Provide adequate workplace heating, such as portable heaters, to ensure work areas are warm enough when they are occupied
- Design processes that minimize exposure to cold areas and cold products
- Reduce draughts while keeping adequate ventilation
- Provide insulating floor coverings or special footwear when workers must stand for long periods on cold floors
- Provide appropriate protective clothing for cold environments

The employer can also change work systems:

- Limit exposure by introducing systems such as flexible working patterns or job rotation
- Provide enough breaks to allow workers to get hot drinks or warm up in heated areas
- PPE and workplace temperature
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) reduces the body's ability to evaporate sweat. If the PPE is awkward to wear, or heavy, it may contribute to an increase in body heat.

Wearing PPE in warm/hot temperatures with high work rates may increase the risk of heat stress.

How to keep workers safe wearing PPE

Employers should encourage workers to remove PPE immediately after it is needed. This will prevent any heat retained in their clothing from continuing to heat them. Where necessary, they should allow it to dry out, or replace it, before using PPE again.

PPE may prevent workers removing clothing in case it exposes them to the hazard it is protecting them from.

Where PPE is required, it can cause heat stress due to its weight and the fact that it prevents sweat evaporating from the skin. In these situations, employers should:

- Allow slower work rates
- Rotate staff out of this environment on a more frequent basis
- Allow longer recovery times
- Provide facilities for PPE to be dried so it can be worn again
- Consider scheduling work to cooler times of the day

Outdoor working

When working outdoors, the weather can have a serious impact on workers' health if the risks have not been properly managed.

- This impact may be immediate or occur over a longer time, leading to conditions like skin cancer.
- The weather can also affect a worker's ability to keep safe, for example when handling machinery.
- There are simple actions that can be taken to protect people working outdoors.

Cold environments

- Ensure the personal protective equipment issued is appropriate
- The employer should provide mobile facilities for warming up, and soup or hot drinks
- The employer can introduce more frequent rest breaks
- The employer can consider delaying the work until warmer times of the year without compromising on safety
- The employer should make sure workers can recognize the early symptoms of cold stress, such as a cough or body aches

Hot environments

- Look to reschedule work to cooler times of the day
- The employer should provide more frequent breaks and introduce shading to rest areas
- The employer should provide free access to cool drinking water
- The employer should introduce shading in areas where people are working
- The employer should encourage workers to remove personal protective equipment when resting to help encourage heat loss
- The employer should make sure workers can recognize the early symptoms of heat stress

Working in the sun

Too much sunlight can cause skin damage including sunburn, blistering and skin ageing. In the long term, it can lead to an increased risk of skin cancer.