

Guidance Note GN 030

## Workplace Temperature

April 2001

The Safety Unit is often asked "What is the maximum temperature for the workplace?". This Guidance note is intended to explain the legal requirements relating to temperature of the workplace and to provide advice on the course of action to be taken in periods of hot weather.

### 1. What is the maximum temperature for the workplace?

The simple answer is that there is no legally-stated maximum temperature. The main Regulations dealing with indoor workroom temperature are the **Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992**.

Regulation 7 of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 states:

1. During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable.
2. A method of heating or cooling shall not be used which results in the escape into a workplace of fumes, gas or vapour of such character and to such extent that they are likely to be injurious or offensive to any person.
3. A sufficient number of thermometers shall be provided to enable persons at work to determine the temperature in any workplace inside a building.

Thus there is no maximum or minimum temperature in law; it all depends on what is considered to be "reasonable". The regulations apply to ALL workplaces, and so you cannot have a frozen food warehouse operating above 0° C nor could you control a blast steel furnace down to, say, 20° C.

### 2. Health and Safety Executive Guidance

There is an Approved Code of Practice accompanying the Regulations<sup>1</sup> which states:

"The temperature in workrooms should normally be at least 16 degrees Celsius unless much of the work involves severe physical effort in which case the temperature should be at least 13 degrees Celsius. These temperatures may not, however, ensure reasonable comfort, depending on other factors such as air movement and relative humidity.

<sup>1</sup> *Workplace health, safety and welfare. Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. Approved Code of Practice and guidance* L24 HSE Books 1992 ISBN 0 7176 0413 6

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"Where a reasonably comfortable temperature cannot be achieved throughout a workroom, local heating or cooling (as appropriate) should be provided. In extremely hot weather fans and increased ventilation may be used instead of local cooling.

"Where, despite the provision of local heating or cooling, workers are exposed to temperatures which do not give reasonable comfort, suitable protective clothing and rest facilities should be provided. Where practical there should be systems of work to ensure that the length of time for which individual workers are exposed to uncomfortable temperatures is limited."

In 1999, the Health and Safety Executive published a guidance booklet "Thermal comfort in the workplace - guidance for employers"<sup>2</sup>. This included a Section "Some simple ways you can ensure thermal comfort in hot weather" which stated:

"You can help ensure thermal comfort in hot weather by:

- (a) putting insulating material around hot plant or pipes;
- (b) providing air-cooling or air-conditioning plant;
- (c) providing fans, eg either desk, pedestal or ceiling-mounted fans;
- (d) ensuring that windows can be opened;
- (e) shading windows with blinds or using reflective film to reduce the heating effect of the sun;
- (f) siting workstations away from direct sunlight and places or plant which radiate heat;
- (g) providing additional facilities, eg cold water dispensers (water is preferable to caffeine or carbonated drinks);
- (h) introducing work systems to limit exposure, such as flexible working patterns, eg early start/finish times;
- (i) allowing sufficient breaks to enable employees to get cold drinks or cool down;
- (j) introducing flexible working practices such as flexible hours or earlier starts to the working day to avoid the worst effects of working in exceptionally high temperatures;
- (k) relaxing formal dress codes, but you must ensure that personal protective equipment is provided and used if required."

Clearly some of these cannot be applied to all circumstances at College; nevertheless they serve as a useful guide for departments to take action as appropriate.

The Health and Safety Executive take a particular interest in activities where high workplace temperatures could affect the safety of the worker - one of their main concerns being work in Containment Level 3 laboratories where work with dangerous pathogens is carried out.

### Summary

Thus, if the temperature in the workplace is such that it is affecting the worker AND it is due to the work process then steps should be taken to make it comfortable or to devise a safe system of work; if it is due to very warm weather then you can use additional fans etc.

NOTE that fans provide a cooling effect because of the passage of air over the body, which causes increased evaporation. Staff must be aware that they will need to increase their fluid intake to avoid health problems.

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<sup>2</sup> *Thermal comfort in the workplace - Guidance for employers* HSG194 HSE 1999 Books ISBN 0 7176 2468 4