

IOSH sounds alarm on climate dangers at work

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[The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health](#) (IOSH) has called for joined-up action to prevent people from being harmed by climate change while at work.

With nearly three-quarters of the world's workers exposed to excessive heat every year, IOSH wants governments to develop and enforce climate-related health and safety regulations as part of existing labour and occupational safety and health (OSH) laws. This, it says, should particularly focus on vulnerable workers.

Meanwhile, IOSH is calling on businesses to ensure they have climate-related risk management rooted into their internal policies and systems.

IOSH has made the calls in a new white paper, [The heat is on: protecting worker health and safety from the impacts of climate change](#).

The paper highlights a growing "crisis" at work with people being exposed to a range of climate-related risks to their health and safety, including extreme temperatures, poor air quality, increases in vector-borne and infectious diseases, and storm surges.

The issue is particularly severe for certain sectors and groups of workers, including agricultural workers, emergency responders, construction workers and commercial fishermen. Even those who work indoors are at risk, with heat and air pollution threatening manufacturing and warehouse workers.

Ruth Wilkinson, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at IOSH, said: "We see and hear about the real-life stories about the impact that climate change is having on our world and in our communities. But what about the

impacts of climate change on the health and safety of people at work?

“Whether these are emergency responders responding to climate events, or to workers undertaking their work indoors or outdoors where they are at climate-related risks. This is a growing crisis that will only get worse if collective action isn’t taken.

“This action needs to be coordinated. We are calling on governments to factor climate-related risks into their labour and OSH laws. We want to see more investment, including in research to deepen understanding of the risks to workers and to facilitate adaptations and mitigations to the work-related impacts of climate change.

“Businesses need to ensure they include these risks in their internal processes, ensuring they assess the climate-related risks, and that they take action to mitigate the risks in a proportionate manner. Controls in place should include training and awareness for all workers. The implementation within internal processes should all be part of robust occupational health and safety management systems and risk management processes.”

As well as calls to governments and businesses, IOSH has also highlighted the important role health and safety professionals have to play. This includes through assisting businesses with their approach to managing the risks.

The launch of IOSH’s white paper coincides with the publication of a [report from the Lloyd’s Register Foundation Global Safety Evidence Centre](#), which reviews the evidence on how climate change heightens risks for workers, including sector-specific impacts such as those on construction, manufacturing, and mining and quarrying.

Nancy Hey, Director of Evidence and Insight at the Foundation, said: “As the effects of climate change continue, the impact on work is also changing. This affects all of us, but some sectors and geographies stand to be more affected than others.

“IOSH’s paper highlights what can be done to manage these risks. Our own report has shown a need to work together on evidence to inform the actions that must be taken to protect workers, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

“Where there is good existing evidence – such as on risks from heat and UV radiation – we must collaborate to get that knowledge to sectors and regions that need it – sometimes suddenly – as their industries change. This will be key to protecting workers.”

Ruth added: “The impacts of climate change are already being realised. Action to address climate change needs to happen at multilateral, national and local levels, including with businesses.

“As part of this collective global action, it’s crucial we consider the impacts on people, and specifically on workers and those vulnerable worker groups, so that adaptation and mitigation measures can be taken.

“So, we all have a role to play, we need to work together to share knowledge and learning, and take action to manage the risks. Action needs to be taken, and fast.”