

Unions launch “week of action” to keep workers safe in hot weather as scorching summer continues

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[The TUC](#) has organised a nationwide inspection of workplaces this week for heat safety, with more than 1,000 trade union health and safety reps signed up to take part.

With the UK in the midst of its third heatwave this summer, and after the hottest June on record, many workers will be at greater risk.

Working in hot weather can lead to dehydration, tiredness, muscle cramps, fainting, and – in the most extreme cases – loss of consciousness.

Workers who are working for long periods in high temperatures are at serious risk of sunstroke, heat stress and even skin cancer.

Workplace checks and safety steps

Trade union reps will check workplace temperatures, and they will discuss with employers the protective steps they can take, including:

1. Keeping workplace buildings cool: Workplaces can be kept cooler and more bearable by taking simple steps such as opening windows, using fans, moving staff away from windows or sources of heat.

2. Sensible hours and shaded areas for outdoor workers: Outside tasks should be scheduled for early morning and late afternoon, not between 11am-3pm when UV radiation levels and temperatures are highest. Bosses should provide canopies/shades where possible.
3. Allowing flexible working: Giving staff the chance to come in earlier or stay later will let them avoid the stifling and unpleasant conditions of the rush hour commute. Bosses should also consider enabling staff to work from home while it is hot.
4. Sun protection: Prolonged sun exposure is dangerous for outdoor workers, so employers should provide sunscreen.
5. Climate-proofing workplaces: Preparing our buildings for increasingly hot weather, by installing ventilation, air-cooling and energy efficiency measures.
6. Temporarily relaxing their workplace dress codes: Encouraging staff to work in more casual clothing than normal – leaving the jackets and ties at home – will help them keep cool.
7. Keeping staff comfortable: Allowing staff to take frequent breaks and providing a supply of cold drinks will all help keep workers cool.

Maximum working temperatures

Unlike other countries, Britain does not have maximum legal working temperatures.

We do however have minimum working temperatures, with the HSE's code of practice setting out that the temperature in a workplace should normally be at least 16 degrees Celsius.

The government has committed to modernise health and safety guidance with reference to extreme temperatures, with the Health and Safety Executive leading a review of guidance, which the TUC welcomes as an opportunity to ensure that workplaces are fit for purpose as our climate changes. This review must include the introduction of maximum workplace temperature guidelines:

- Employers should take steps to reduce temperatures if they get above 24°C and workers feel uncomfortable.

- Work should stop above a maximum temperature of 30°C, or 27°C for those doing strenuous jobs.

Climate change

Britain had the warmest spring on record this year. It was also the hottest June on record in England, and the second hottest across Britain.

With our climate rapidly changing, the TUC says we urgently need to upgrade our buildings and infrastructure, so that they remain functional during heatwaves. Our homes and workplaces were largely built in previous centuries, for a different climate. Many of them are not prepared for a hotter Britain.

We must also deliver rapid and just climate action so that we can prevent global heating becoming ever more extreme, with greater costs to workers' lives.

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said:

"Everyone should be safe at work. But working in a heatwave can be dangerous – especially when your employer wants you to carry on regardless.

"That's why union reps are taking action this week to keep their workmates safe in the heat. And it's why we're calling on the government to strengthen legal protections with a maximum working temperature.

"A lot of the best safety steps are just common sense. For example, employers should allow flexible hours to avoid the hottest parts of the day. And indoor workplaces should be kept at comfortable temperatures, with relaxed dress codes.

"If you're concerned about your working conditions, joining a union is the best way to make sure that your safety is respected by your employer."

On climate action to keep workers safe, Paul added:

"Most of us know that climate action is needed to protect our way of life. And we can be proud of the progress we are making. With wind, solar and nuclear, Britain is building a foundation of cleaner, cheaper energy.

"We must now look at ways to speed up progress. This will protect British industry and the people working in it. And it will provide the national security of our own energy to power our homes, our transport and British industry for generations to come."