

# Heatwaves and Sweltering Offices – Is it Time for a Legal Maximum Workplace

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A leading facilities management expert has called for a national debate on whether Britain should introduce a legal maximum workplace temperature as climate change drives more frequent heatwaves and rising summer temperatures.

Tony Earnshaw, chief executive of [UK Commercial Group](#), believes current workplace regulations may no longer be fit for purpose in an era where temperatures regularly exceed levels that can affect employee wellbeing and productivity.

Under the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations, employers are required to provide a “reasonable” indoor temperature for workers. However, unlike minimum temperature requirements, there is currently no legally defined maximum temperature for most indoor workplaces.

He says the lack of clear guidance leaves employers and employees facing increasing uncertainty as summers become hotter. “The UK’s workplace temperature regulations were developed at a time when the primary concern was ensuring buildings were warm enough. Climate change means we now need to consider the opposite problem.

“Most people have experienced trying to work in an overheated office. Concentration suffers, people become fatigued more quickly and productivity inevitably falls.

“If we are facing more frequent heatwaves and higher average temperatures in the years ahead, it is reasonable to ask whether existing workplace regulations remain fit for purpose.”

Research has consistently shown that excessive heat can significantly affect workplace performance. As

temperatures approach and exceed 28°C, cognitive function, concentration and decision-making ability begin to decline, while workers are more likely to experience headaches, dehydration and fatigue.

The World Health Organization recommends indoor office temperatures of between 18°C and 24°C to support comfort, health and productivity.

Tony believes employers should increasingly view cooling systems as essential workplace infrastructure rather than an optional luxury.

“Air conditioning is often discussed purely in terms of comfort, but modern systems provide much wider benefits,” he said.

“They help regulate humidity, improve air quality and remove allergens, creating healthier working environments throughout the year.

“The question policymakers need to consider is whether businesses should receive greater support to invest in these systems, particularly as climate change continues to reshape how we live and work.”

He suggested that measures such as grants, enhanced capital allowances or other incentives could help businesses improve workplace environments while boosting productivity and supporting employee wellbeing.

“Businesses want to do the right thing, but many are operating under significant cost pressures,” he said.

“If the UK is serious about adapting to a changing climate, we need to have a grown-up conversation about how workplaces are designed and what support employers may need to make those changes.”

Mr Earnshaw also stressed the importance of maintaining air conditioning and ventilation systems to ensure they operate efficiently and continue delivering health and environmental benefits.

“As temperatures rise, workplace cooling is becoming a business resilience issue as much as a comfort issue,” he added. “The debate is no longer whether the climate is changing. It’s how we adapt to it.”