Feeling the Heat

Hot work, either outdoors or indoors, can certainly lead to an increase in accidents and injuries. Some, unenlightened employers, see this as just a seasonal irritation...

Have workplace risk assessments identified problems with hot temperatures in the workplace?

If you work outdoors—
- Are you supplied with loose fitting clothes?
- Are you supplied with hats and neck protection?
- Are you supplied with sunscreen?
- Is the work planned so that it is possible to work in the shade during the hottest parts of the day?
- Are regular breaks encouraged?
- Are cool drinks available?

If you work indoors—
- Are there thermometers available to enable you to monitor the temperature?
- Are internal heat sources insulated properly?
- Are windowsshaded to cut down direct sunlight?
- Has the building been properly insulated?
- Can any clothing/uniform policy be relaxed?
- Is there provision for cool drinks and cooler areas for breaks?
- Can an agreed maximum internal temperature be negotiated?

This list is not exhaustive and there may need to raise other health and safety issues with your safety rep, organiser or RHSO.

GMB feels, in line with the World Health Organisation and the TUC, that a suitable maximum would be 25°C (75°F).
Whatever the arguments around global warming there is little doubt that summers seem to be getting hotter and more intense. As temperatures rise workers in all industries suffer. Making in-roads into issues around climate change is unlikely to be easy and there is a danger that, in some areas, workers will take little or no action to protect themselves. It is right that everyone protects themselves and that employers take sensible action to protect their workforce and ensure a safe working environment.

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What the employer should do
To enable your workplace to have a reasonable temperature your employer should take the following measures:

- Provide good ventilation, which should consist of a flow of fresh or purified air. Windows can sometimes supply this but there may be issues for this to be provided by mechanical means. This can be achieved by providing air cooling plant or air conditioning units.
- If temporary cooling units are used these should be replaced on a permanent basis to avoid annual disagreements over their supply.
- Windows should be shaded to deflect direct heat and glare and also associated with radiation exposure and glare.

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