

Heat - it's a hazard

Heat is a serious workplace hazard, particularly for workers working outside during summer. This is a hazard that's only going to get worse with the impacts of climate change, so now is the time to act!

Eliminate

Eliminating the source of heat (eg. the sun) may not always be possible, but you can eliminate the risk by ensuring workers don't have to work in extreme heat. Negotiate a maximum work temperature with your employer, and once that temperature is exceeded, work must cease.

If the heat source isn't environmental heat (eg. heat from a machine), remove the heat source from the work environment if practicable.

Change work environment

If it is not reasonably practicable to remove the source of heat from the work environment, consider changing the work environment. For outdoor workers, this could mean moving inside or into shade during hottest parts of the day, and ensuring rest areas are cool. For indoor workers interventions could include air conditioning, improving air flow with open windows or fans or insulating the building.

Change the system of work

If possible, change the system of work to avoid the hottest parts of the day/year. For outdoor workers performing strenuous work, consider moving strenuous work to the early morning or evening to avoid the heat of the day. Also consider negotiating more frequent rest breaks on hot days (and ensure there's a cool place to take those breaks!)

Change the work tasks

Check to see if strenuous tasks can be mechanised in extreme heat eg. replace sawing by hand with an electric saw, manual shovelling with machinery.

Administrative controls

Negotiate a heat policy with your employer including the above controls plus: heat safety signage, provision of cool water and sunscreen, heat appropriate changes to workplace dress code to allow lighter clothing/shorts to be worn.

PPE

PPE should be used in conjunction with other, higher order controls. Heat appropriate PPE includes light, protective clothing, hats, polarised sunglasses and sunscreen.

Your employer has a duty to provide a safe and healthy workplace as far as reasonably practicable. If your employer isn't taking heat safety seriously, contact your union.