

Independent Guide

What does an FM need to know about workplace temperature?



Independent workplace compliance

Summer Temperature

During the summer months we all enjoy the warm weather, but some people may not find their workplace comfortable. The purpose of this guide is to provide practical help with understanding the issues and actions that can be taken to alleviate problems.

Thermal Comfort

There is currently no actual maximum legal working temperature, the comfort of the majority of workers being the best judge of satisfactory conditions. This is because there's more to it than just room temperature. 'Thermal comfort' describes a person's state of mind in terms of whether they feel too hot or too cold. Environmental factors (such as humidity and sources of heat in the workplace) combine with personal factors (such as the clothing you're wearing and how physically demanding your work is) to influence what is called your 'thermal comfort'.

So what is acceptable?

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 lay down particular requirements for most aspects of the working environment. Regulation 7 deals specifically with the temperature for indoor workplaces and states that: 'During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable.' In particular circumstance such as industry where real extremes of temperature can be experienced, full risk assessments are required to ensure thermal comfort and avoidance of heat or cold stress.

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 defines a reasonable temperature indoors as being normally at least 16 °C unless the work involves severe physical work in which case the temperature should be at least 13°C. Research 'meta-analysis' conducted by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in 2006 'focused on the effects of temperature on performance at office work'.

The results of this study showed 'that performance increases with temperatures around 21-22°C and decreases with temperatures below 20°C and above 23-24°C'. The highest productivity is at a temperature of around 22°C and at 30°C as much as 9% in productivity can be lost. CIBSE (Guide A) recommends 21-23°C in winter and 22-24°C in summer.

What can be done?

In office environments, where most people only experience a few weeks of hot weather a year, simple temporary remedial actions can be taken such as;

- Relaxing usual dress code for non-customer facing staff
- Ensuring blinds are used effectively to reduce solar heat gain
- Using portable air conditioning units if necessary
- Ensuring wholesome drinking water is readily available

How can I check if we are doing enough?

Personal comfort is a subjective area but regular consultation with occupiers can help communication and understanding of the issues. In an environment where the majority of people are comfortable there will always be a minority who are dissatisfied with their working conditions. The cause of their discomfort may have causes other than the temperature in the office.

However, if several people have similar complaints about the levels of comfort in their workplace, an independent audit of the conditions may help. This will cover areas such as workplace humidity, temperature and airflow, as well as specific indoor air quality measures of gases such as carbon dioxide, which can influence a person's perception of comfort.

This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting. Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent compliance consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. We have over 30 years' experience of helping customers of all sizes, from across all sectors, manage their compliance responsibilities, making sure that their organisation is compliant, their employees are safe, their processes are cost effective and their management team is in control.



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