

BAWU GUIDE TO TEMPERATURES IN THE WORKPLACE

Because of the nature of the industry we work in, there will always be concerns about working temperatures. From one extreme to the other, the heat of oven work to the cold of the frozen food plant, temperature is a serious health & safety issue and one that we need to address.

Too much heat and we run the risk of serious fatigue, heat stroke and even death, likewise too much exposure to cold can cause frost bite, hypothermia, comma and possible fatality.

Extremes of temperature can cause extremes of consequence.

Whilst British legislation does not set a maximum working temperature, it is interesting that the World Health Organisation recommends a maximum air temperature of 75°F/24°C for workers to work comfortably.

Despite the absence of a maximum temperature there are protections for BFAWU members under current legislation. The **Health & Safety at Work Act 1974** obliges the employer to provide a workplace that is safe and without risk to health, whilst the **Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992**, clearly state that the employer must assess the risks and introduce prevention/control measures based on those assessments. Coupled with the **Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992** (Regulation 7), which states that a reasonable temperature should be maintained during working hours. In fact the Approved Code of Practice to these regulations states, “that all reasonable steps should be taken to achieve a comfortable temperature”.

These pieces of legislation clearly leave the field open when it comes to determining definitions of risk and reasonableness, but clearly to do nothing could lead to prosecution.

SOME OF THE EFFECTS THAT HEAT HAS ON THE BODY:

- **Uncomfortable levels of heat at the lower level are more likely to cause accidents because it lowers concentration levels.**
- **Dehydration caused by loss of fluids due to perspiration giving rise to cramp, headache and fatigue.**

- Heat Stress with symptoms of nausea, extreme tiredness, dizziness, clammy skin, racing pulse, fainting, lower levels of concentration and tolerance.
- Heat Stroke can occur if the temperature of the blood rises above 39°C/102°F and can cause confusion, incoherent speech, convulsions, organ damage and possible death.

All the above symptoms are avoidable with proper risk assessing and realistic control measures, some simple to achieve others that need some thought, for example:

- Access to cool drinking water at all times, extra breaks, limited amounts of salt.
- Cooler clothing.
- Increased ventilation, fans or air conditioning.
- Avoidance of direct sunlight through windows by using shades.
- Where possible the reduction of heavy physical work.

When assessing risks to heat, it should be recognised that women who are pregnant are more susceptible to heat intolerance and that new mothers may incur difficulties in breast feeding if they are dehydrated.

In cold working environments the Approved code of Practice under the **Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992** states that the workroom should normally be 16°C/61°F most types of work with a minimum 13°C/55°F where severe physical effort is used.

If it is impossible to maintain these temperatures, for instance in a deep freeze, then the employer should endeavour to provide a warm work station, using localised heating, draught exclusion etc. As in all control measures Personal Protective Equipment should only be considered once all the other avenues have been explored.

These exceptions apply only to environments where it is not feasible to keep the entire workplace warm. Workplaces made cold by the weather or draughts are covered by the legislation and are not subject to the special provisions.

SOME OF THE EFFECTS OF COLD UPON THE BODY:

- **Reynaulds disease, white finger, possible frostbite.**



- Tiredness and fatigue due to the body over working to keep warm.
- Slipping hazards causing broken bones.
- At extremely low temperatures, hypothermia, unconsciousness and possible death if the body temperature drops below 18°C/64°F.

In the food industry there are very strict regulations governing the temperatures at which food should be kept.

There are also strict guidelines governing the transportation of livestock.

THIS DOES NOT APPLY TO THE WORKERS OR THE WORKPLACE.

