**Background**

KCC is legally required to provide a working environment which is safe and without risk to health. This includes monitoring and maintaining temperatures within buildings to make sure they are reasonable.

# Scope

KCC is required to monitor the temperature in all its workplaces and take appropriate steps to ensure that the working temperature for employees and service users is reasonable.

# The why, what and how

Temperature is an important aspect of the working environment and can be a cause of occupational discomfort and stress. Managers at all levels have a duty to ensure that the working temperature is reasonable during working hours.

What is considered reasonable depends on the nature of the workplace and will clearly vary in, for instance, a bakery, a coldstore, a warehouse and an office. ' Workroom' means a room where people normally work for more than short periods.

An acceptable temperature for most people in the UK lies roughly between 16°Celsius (60°F) and 26°Celsius (84°F).  Acceptable temperatures for more strenuous types of work are concentrated towards the bottom end of the range (13°C) and for more inactive activities they lie towards the higher end (at least 16°C).

KCC heating and cooling of the office environment policy states, *KCC is to reach a minimum temperature of 18°Celsius by 10am and maintain this until 5pm, on normal working days.*

These temperatures refer to readings taken using an ordinary dry bulb thermometer close to workstations, at working height and away from windows.

The temperature in all indoor workplaces should be reasonably comfortable. Where such a temperature is impractical because of hot or cold processes, all steps should be taken to achieve a temperature as close as possible to ‘comfortable’.

These temperatures alone may not, however, ensure reasonable comfort as this also depends on factors such as air movement and relative humidity.

Managers are required to monitor the workplace temperatures and consider the implications of both high and low temperatures. Appropriate action should be taken, in consultation with staff, when temperatures become uncomfortable.

**Appropriate action could include:**

* Providing cold drinks, longer or more frequent refreshment breaks
* relaxing dress codes (but not where safety could be compromised such as hard hats, gloves or overalls)
* allowing work to be taken home
* planning the working day to ensure that the most demanding tasks take place when the environment is coolest (e.g. early mornings)
* insulating hot pipes or plant
* providing an air cooling plant
* shading windows
* siting workplaces away from areas subject to radiant heat.

Where a reasonably comfortable temperature cannot be achieved throughout a workroom, local cooling should be provided. In extremely hot weather, fans and increased ventilation may be used instead of local cooling.

Where, even with local cooling, workers are exposed to temperatures that still do not give reasonable comfort, suitable protective clothing and rest facilities should be provided. Where practical, systems of work (such as task rotation) should be used to ensure that individual workers are exposed to uncomfortable temperatures for a limited time only.

Further guidance can be found in Frequently Asked Questions.

The topics and docmentation below refers to legislation and industry standards. To read these in greater detail visit Knet/Kelsi.

**Topics**

* Managing health and safety
* workplace health, safety and welfare
* risk assessments
* heating and cooling of the office environment policy.

**Legislation**

* The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
* The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

For further information on regulations please visit the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website or legislation.gov.uk.

# Frequently Asked Questions

### **How can high temperatures in the workplace affect employees and service users?**

High temperatures in the workplace can affect the body’s ability to cool itself.  Staff, employees and others who are exposed to continual high temperatures can be at risk from heat stress or exhaustion, especially when the body’s core temperature exceeds 37°C.

Typical symptoms of heat exhaustion include:

* Fatigue
* giddiness
* irritability
* headaches
* sickness.

These symptoms can lead to:

* Sweaty hands
* fainting
* nausea
* tiredness
* dehydration
* loss of concentration.

At best, these symptoms can lead to a decline in the performance of the individual. In a ‘worst case senario’ they could lead to an accident affecting either the individual or to others. In some circumstances heat stress can result in heat stroke. This can have serious consequences and managers are advised to seek medical advice if a member of staff is affected in this way.

### **What is the maximum/minimum temperature for a workplace?**

**Minimum**

The temperature should be at least 16°C for most workplaces, KCC aim for the minimum temperature to be 18°C on a normal working day, unless the work involves severe physical effort, in which case the temperature should be at least 13°C.

**Maximum**

There is no legal maximum temperature but it is recommended that managers make reasonable adjustments at 26°C.

The temperature reading on an ordinary thermometer is not the only factor that needs to be considered, as the following will all add to heat stress:

* Carrying out physical work:  the more energetic the work the lower the temperature needed to carry out continuous work safely.
* The length of time staff are exposed to the temperature.
* Air movement and ventilation: adequate air movement and ventilation is needed to reduce heat stress.
* Humidity:  humid air slows the evaporation of sweat from the skin, which means workers in steamy workplaces like kitchens may be more at risk.
* Radiant heat - e.g. from hot surfaces and the sun - increases the risks of heat stress.
* The clothing worn by the workforce:  tight fitting clothing and heavy protective clothing or uniforms will add to heat stress.

### **What other factors should be considered when thinking about temperatures at work?**

* **Factors such as what protective clothing is being worn, physical activity, radiant heat, humidity, air movement and the length of time a person spends doing a job must all be taken into account when assessing what a “reasonable temperature” is.**
* **Air introduced into the workplace should as far as possible, be free of any impurity likely to be offensive or cause ill health.  Air that is taken from the outside can normally be considered to be ‘fresh’, but air inlets for ventilation systems should not be sited where they may draw in excessively contaminated air.**
* **There must be enough thermometers available so that workers can check the temperature in indoor workplaces.**
* **It is important to make sure that every enclosed workplace is ventilated by a sufficient quantity of fresh or purified air.**
* **An adequate supply of wholesome drinking water and cups should be available, readily accessible and clearly marked.**
* **Consider the heat generated from Display Screen Equipment (DSE) at work stations. Individuals should not be exposed to excess heat and the equipment should not produce excess heat that could make operators or users uncomfortable.**
* If employees are doing tasks which include manual handling (lifting and carrying), a risk assessment that takes into account the risks from hot and humid conditions should be carried out.
* Employers are required to assess the risk to expectant mothers specifically.  Extremes of heat is a particular risk as women who are pregnant tolerate heat less well and may faint more readily or be more liable to heat stress. The risk is likely to be reduced after birth, but it is not clear how quickly things improve. Breastfeeding may be impaired by heat dehydration.

Expectant mothers should take great care when exposed to prolonged heat at work. Rest facilities and access to refreshments should help.