Guidance on Workplace Temperatures

The HSE’s Infoline’s most frequently asked question is:

What is the maximum/minimum temperature in the workplace?

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 lay down particular requirements for most aspects of the working environment. These Regulations require that:

(a) workplaces must be adequately ventilated (regulation 6);
(b) the temperature during working hours shall be reasonable (regulation 7);
(c) any method of heating or cooling used should not produce dangerous or offensive fumes, gas or vapour (regulation 7); and
(d) thermometers should be provided in the workplace to measure temperature (regulation 7).

The application of the regulation depends on the nature of the workplace e.g. a bakery, a cold store, an office, or a warehouse. These Regulations do not apply to outdoor workplaces.

The associated Approved Code Of Practice goes on to explain:

“The temperature in workrooms should provide reasonable comfort without the need for special clothing. Where such a temperature is impractical because of hot or cold processes, all reasonable steps should be taken to achieve a temperature which is as close as possible to comfortable. 'Workroom' means a room where people normally work for more than short periods.

The temperature in workrooms should normally be at least 16 degrees Celsius unless much of the work involves severe physical effort in which case the temperature should be at least 13 degrees Celsius. These temperatures may not, however, ensure reasonable comfort, depending on other factors such as air movement and relative humidity.”

The HSE produce a publication called Thermal Comfort in the Workplace (HSG194, ISBN 0717624684, £3.50), which provides further guidance.
Although there is no maximum temperature stated in the regulations, the guidance states:

“An acceptable zone of thermal comfort for most people in the UK lies roughly between 13°C (56°F) and 30°C (86°F), with acceptable temperatures for more strenuous work activities concentrated towards the bottom end of the range, and more sedentary activities towards the higher end.”

"Thermal Comfort in the Workplace" offers practical steps that employers can take, such as:

- providing air conditioning or fans (even ensuring windows can be opened);
- shading windows with blinds;
- siting workstations away from direct sunlight;
- providing additional facilities, for example, cold water dispensers;
- allowing breaks to allow employees to get cold drinks or to cool down; and
- introducing more flexible hours to avoid the worst effects of working in exceptionally high temperatures.

Copies of the guidance can be ordered from the University Bookshop. A copy is available for reference in the Safety Services Office.

Humidity can affect thermal comfort and further information on the effects of humidity can be found in "How to Deal with Sick Building Syndrome - Guidance for employers, building owners and building managers", HS(G)132, £8.50, HSE Books.

Some aspects of the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 may need to be considered, especially for those working in warehouses or cold stores.

In deciding what actions to take the general principles of risk assessment must be employed.

There is further information in the free HSE leaflet “Workplace health, safety and welfare – a brief guide for managers”, INDG244, which can be downloaded from http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg244.pdf

July 2003