



# ORGANISE

Union News for delegates and workplace representatives



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## Your rights at work summer tips– is your workplace too hot to handle?

It's officially summer-time, and Victorian workers can anticipate that we'll have at least a few scorching hot work days to contend with this year. We can't do much about the sleepless nights or mosquitos, but the ASU can help make sure your workplace is reasonably comfortable this summer. Read on to learn about your summer-time rights at work.

Unfortunately, in Victoria there are *no specific statutory or regulatory limits on temperatures* to which workers can be exposed. BUT your employer does have a duty of care under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 2004 to provide as far as practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. This includes monitoring temperatures at the workplace.

### Your employer's responsibility

WorkSafe's Compliance Code for Workplace amenities and the Environment requires that offices be "capable of maintaining a temperature range that is comfortable and suitable to the work", and states that "Optimum comfort for sedentary work is between 20oC and 26oC", or the temperature that most people find comfortable.

When the temperature inside the office moves outside that comfortable range, management has a responsibility to respond. Some solutions include:

- Engineering controls such as air conditioning, fans, shade cloth, or barriers from heat sources
- Providing staff with additional rest breaks in cool areas
- Providing easy access to cool drinking water (WorkSafe Victoria provisions require employers to provide free, clean drinking water. At least one drinking point is required for every forty employees)
- Rescheduling work so that hot tasks are performed during the cooler part of the day
- Reducing the time an individual spends on hot tasks (eg. By job rotation)
- Arranging for more workers to do the job

The Commonwealth Guidelines advise that there should be no adverse health effects (for normal healthy people) from working when the temperature is between 18-30oC, but that outside that range some staff may be affected, and a 'common sense approach' is to evacuate affected parts of the building.

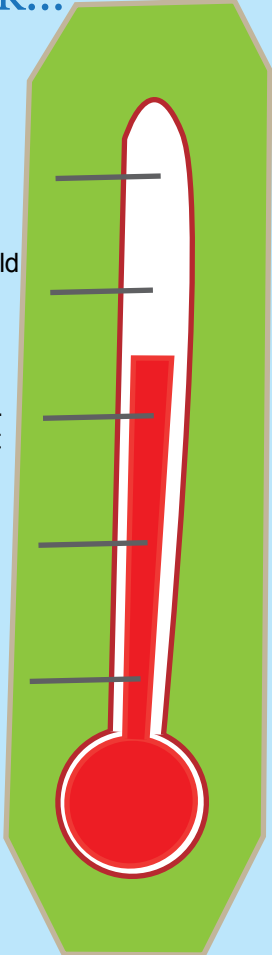
### Air conditioning

Where there is an air conditioning system in your workplace, your employer also has a responsibility to ensure this is regularly serviced. If the air conditioning breaks down and the office temperature moves outside the range of 20-26oC, management should provide alternative arrangements in the short term and move to fix the air conditioner as soon as possible.

Air conditioners can sometimes cause health problems. If you believe your building's air conditioner is causing problems, tell a supervisor or OHS rep.

*Over page: OHS tips for summer and what to do if you or your colleagues are feeling unwell in the heat*

## Keep cool @ Work...



**30°C**  
Heat becomes a health and safety risk. Employers must reduce staff exposure to heat. Sick workers should complete an incident report form.

**26°C**  
Upper limit of comfortable range. Productivity drops. Management should monitor and respond to temperature changes.

**23-25°C**  
Ideal office temperature in summer, when staff are in light clothing

**18°C**  
Commonwealth guidelines: lower limit of comfort

## OHS tips

Where a workplace becomes uncomfortably hot, the workplace temperature can become a hazard, and employers and staff should be vigilant for signs of heat illness.

Heat illness covers a range of medical conditions including

- Heat illness, including:
  - Heat stroke – a life threatening condition requiring immediate first aid and medical attention
  - Fainting
  - Heat exhaustion
  - Heat cramps
  - Rashes
  - Heat fatigue
  - Dehydration
- Aggravation of other medical conditions and illnesses (eg., high blood pressure or heart disease)
- Increase in the likelihood of accidents due to reduced concentration, discomfort of some personal protective gear

Signs of heat illness include feeling sick, dizzy or weak. If you develop these symptoms, it's important to tell someone and make efforts to cool down.

Working in hot conditions may also aggravate pre-existing illnesses and conditions. Working outside comfortable temperatures also increases the likelihood of accidents.

### If you or your colleagues feel unwell

If the indoor temperature is above 30oC and staff are feeling unwell, measures must be taken to cool the office down! Union members should also complete an incident report form to document the situation – this will help to prevent further incidents.

In some cases, depending on how unwell they feel, staff may need to go home. Where management has not been able to implement reasonable measures to address the temperature, staff should not incur any pay penalty. Call your union for information and advice in such situations; don't just assume it's ok to leave once it reaches a certain temperature!

If you feel unsafe in your working environment, inform your OHS representative and management, and call the ASU immediately for advice.

## Happy Holidays!

The ASU would like to wish members taking annual leave over December-January a happy holiday, and advise that the following days are gazetted as public holidays in Victoria.

26 December - Christmas Day Holiday  
27 December - Boxing Day Holiday  
Monday 2 January - New Year's Day



## A.S.U Delegate Training Dates

Core skills (2 days)  
20th-21st March  
31st July - 1st August  
23-24th October

Organising for EBAs (2 days)  
9th-10th May  
9th-10th October

Negotiating for EBAs (2 days)  
17th-18th July

More dates to be announced in 2012



*Support the public sector campaign, and the workers who are there for you!*

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