



Australian Services Union

Victorian Private Sector Branch

Information for your employer

Important information on high temperatures in the workplace

Worksafe Victoria states that the optimum comfortable temperature for sedentary work is between 20°C and 26°C, depending on the time of year and clothing worn.

Outside of this range, the temperature will have a direct effect on productivity and staff morale. Measures to control temperature problems might include:

- Air conditioning
- Cooling fans
- Provide staff with additional breaks from the workplace
- Provide easy access to cool drinking water

Heat – an OHS hazard

The Comcare guidelines state “In respect of air-temperature, in a still air office environment, there should be no adverse health effects, for normally healthy people, from working when the dry bulb air temperature is within the range 18° to 30°C. Outside of this range some staff may become affected and it is essential that corrective action be taken if staff are to remain in the building for other than short periods of time.”

Employers should be aware of the following potential health and safety issues related to excessive heat in the workplace:

- 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 (e.g., high blood pressure or heart disease)
- Increase in the likelihood of accidents due to reduced concentration, discomfort of some personal protective gear

Employers have a duty of care to their employees to provide, as far as practicable, a workplace that is safe and without risks to health. The guidelines state: “Where the workplace is unacceptably uncomfortable, consideration should be given to moving affected staff to suitable alternative accommodation. If this is not possible, then paid leave can be provided to staff until the temperature returns to a satisfactory level.”

For advice on managing heat related OHS issues in office environments, please contact the ASU on (03) 9320-6702 or see these sources for further information:

WorkSafe “Workplace amenities and work environment compliance code” available from www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

Commcare regulations “Occupational Health and Safety Code of Practice 2008” available from www.comcare.gov.au

