

Building Trade Group of Unions

HEAT POLICY

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Why do we need a maximum temperature to conduct work in?

When the workplace gets too hot it is more than just an issue about comfort. If the temperature gets too high, then it becomes a health & safety issue.

What are the risks of working in high temperatures?

Working in extreme heat can result in many risks, ranging from dehydration to fatigue (which is the most common factor in workplace accidents), lowered sperm count and even death.

Why is the CFMEU's recommended maximum temperature for working in 35°C?

The CFMEU have made this recommendation based on studies here in Australia and around the world that show heavy physical activity in temperatures above 35°C can raise the body temperature to levels which put workers lives at risk.

Why is there a recommendation to stop work in high humidity (above 75%)?

As well as temperature, humidity creates a significant risk to worker health & safety. Evaporation of sweat is the body's main defence against heat, and when there is increased moisture in the air (humidity), this process is restricted or stops completely.

How do we measure the temperature at our workplace?

The recommended method is to have a thermometer which complies with Australian Standards placed in an agreed location, which is conducive of the working environment. If this is not practicable the site safety committee shall agree to take readings from the nearest Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) weather station.

What about if I have to work wearing long PPE or respiratory protection?

Then the risks become more apparent at a lower threshold, and you will need to consult with your site safety committee and employers about appropriate control measures such as worker rotations, extra breaks, rescheduling or reducing PPE where practicable.

What if our company already has a heat policy in place?

Most companies already had heat policies in place last summer, and the CFMEU received numerous reports of workers collapsing and/or being forced to continue working in unsafe conditions. The approach of allowing workers to take a break if they feel the effects of heat, does not meet the employer's obligations to protect workers' health & safety.

What if my employer supplies extra drinking water for extreme days?

One of the most crucial control measures to avoid the risks of heat is hydration, it is important to regularly drink water and avoid any caffeinated drinks. However, this should be done at all temperatures not just on extremely hot days and it should be noted that experts say heat related illnesses can still occur even with proper hydration.

What if conditions are unsafe at levels below those mentioned?

The thresholds stated are the absolute maximum's recommended, if work is deemed unsafe at conditions below, then employers have a duty of care to ensure workers are not exposed to risks that effect their health & safety, and workers also have a legal right to remove themselves.

**FOR ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS OR ASSISTANCE, PLEASE CONTACT THE CFMEU OFFICE ON
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