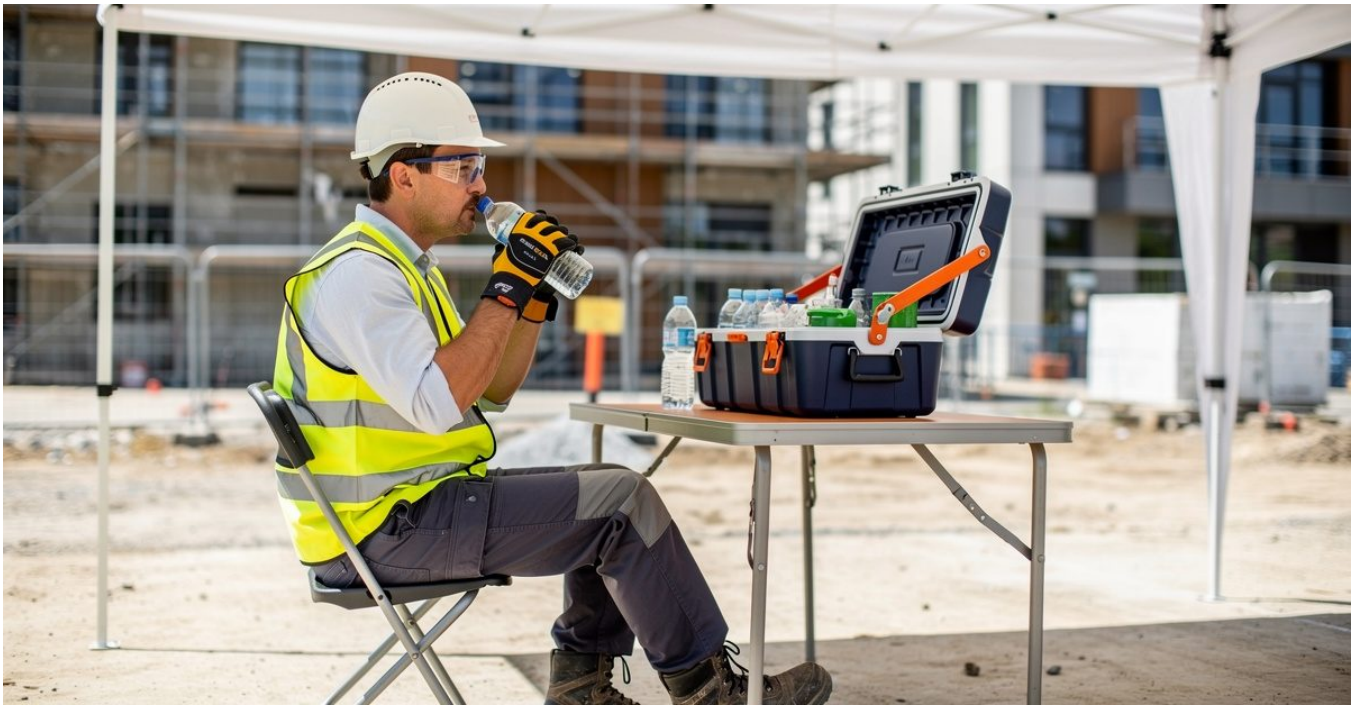
Working in Hot Weather: A Practical Guide to Keeping Staff Safe

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Why Hot Weather Is a Workplace Issue

When temperatures climb, work gets harder. Concentration drops, tempers fray, and the body has to work overtime just to keep cool. For people doing physical jobs, wearing protective equipment, or working outdoors in direct sun, a hot spell is not just uncomfortable, it is a genuine health risk. Heat exhaustion can develop quickly, and if it is not dealt with promptly it can progress to heat stroke, which is a medical emergency requiring immediate treatment.

Employers sometimes assume there is nothing they can do about the weather. In reality, there is a great deal you can do, and the law expects you to think about it in the same way you would think about cold, noise or any other physical hazard. This matters just as much for a warehouse team in warehousing and logistics as it does for a groundworks crew on a construction site.

What the Law Actually Requires

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require the temperature inside workplaces to be reasonable, with an approved code of practice suggesting a minimum of 16 degrees Celsius (or 13 degrees where work involves severe physical effort). There is no maximum temperature set in law. That surprises a lot of employers, but it reflects the fact that what counts as reasonable depends entirely on the work being done; a bakery and an office cannot sensibly share one limit.

What the law does require, under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, is that you assess the risk heat poses to your particular workforce and take sensible, proportionate steps to control it. That assessment should be written down if you employ five or more people, reviewed whenever conditions change significantly, and revisited at least once a year as a matter of good practice, ideally before the start of each summer. For outdoor workers there is the added hazard of ultraviolet exposure: sunburn today is painful, but repeated exposure over a working life raises the risk of skin cancer, and that risk should be captured in your assessment too.

Recognising Heat Stress Before It Becomes Serious

The early signs of heat stress are easy to miss when everyone is busy. Supervisors and first aiders should be briefed to watch for:

- Headaches, dizziness or light-headedness
- Heavy sweating followed, worryingly, by an absence of sweating
- Cramps in the arms, legs or stomach
- Nausea, unusual tiredness or confusion
- Fast, shallow breathing or a rapid pulse

If someone shows signs of heat exhaustion, move them somewhere cool, give them water, loosen tight clothing and let them rest. They should begin to feel better once they have cooled down; if they do not improve, or they become confused, stop sweating, or lose consciousness, treat it as heat stroke and call 999 immediately. This is a conversation to have with your appointed first aiders before the next hot spell, not during it; if your current first aid provision needs updating, a first aid training provider is the right place to arrange that.

Hydration: A Legal Requirement, Not a Perk

People routinely underestimate how much fluid they lose during hot weather, particularly in physical jobs. Many do not drink enough until they feel thirsty, and dehydration on its own causes fatigue, reduced concentration and poorer decision making, long before anyone shows obvious symptoms. The Workplace Regulations require an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water for everyone at work, and in hot conditions that duty becomes a practical priority rather than a box to tick.

Good practice is straightforward. Provide easy access to cool drinking water close to where people actually work, not just in a kitchen three floors away. Encourage small, regular drinks rather than occasional large ones, and remind teams that tea, coffee and energy drinks are no substitute for water. For heavy physical work in serious heat, build in scheduled drink breaks rather than leaving it to chance; relying on individuals to remember is how dehydration creeps up on a team unnoticed.

Building Practical Controls Into the Working Day

Beyond hydration, a mix of small changes usually beats one big one. A compliant arrangement in practice tends to include:

- **Rescheduled tasks.** Heavy or outdoor work moved to early morning or later in the day, with lighter duties kept for the hottest hours.
- **More frequent rest breaks.** Short breaks in the shade or a cool room, taken often enough that fatigue does not build up unnoticed.
- **Improved airflow indoors.** Fans, opened windows, blinds on sun-facing glazing and, where practical, portable air conditioning.
- **Sensibly relaxed dress codes.** Lighter clothing where safety allows; necessary protective equipment is never optional, but lighter-weight alternatives are worth reviewing.
- **Shade and sun protection outdoors.** Lightweight long sleeves, hats with brims, and high-factor sunscreen made available and actively encouraged, not just left in a cupboard.
- **Monitoring, not assuming.** A named supervisor checking in on teams working in heat, rather than hoping everyone will self-report problems.

None of this needs to be complicated or expensive. A short hot weather procedure, agreed roles for who checks on whom, and a stock of water and sunscreen cost very little against the cost of someone being sent home unwell, or worse, a serious heat-related incident.

Who Is Responsible, and What to Record

Responsibility for managing heat risk sits with the employer, but in practice it is usually delegated to site managers and supervisors who need to know what is expected of them. They should know how to recognise heat stress, what adjustments they are authorised to make on the day (extra breaks, task changes, early finishes), and when to escalate to first aid or emergency services.

Keep a simple record of what you have done: the risk assessment itself, any briefing given to supervisors and first aiders, and a note of any significant incidents or near misses during hot weather, including what was changed as a result. This does not need to be extensive, but it matters if anyone is ever unwell and questions are asked about what controls were in place. If you are not sure your current risk assessments hold up to scrutiny, an independent audit is often the quickest way to find out; Integral Safety's auditing and inspection service looks at exactly this kind of practical gap.

Make It Part of How You Manage, Not a Panic Response

The businesses that cope best with heatwaves are the ones that planned for them in spring, not the ones scrambling when the forecast hits 30 degrees. Vulnerable workers deserve particular thought at that planning stage: new and expectant mothers, older workers, people with certain health conditions and those on some medications feel the effects of heat sooner than others, and a good heat plan names how they will be looked after rather than assuming it will sort itself out.

If you would like help building weather-related risks into your risk assessments, or a fresh pair of eyes on your current arrangements, Integral Safety's health and safety consultancy supports businesses across the East Midlands with practical, proportionate advice. Get in touch for a friendly conversation before the next hot spell catches your team out.

Talk to Integral Safety Ltd

We are health and safety consultants based in Coalville, Leicestershire, working with businesses across the East Midlands. If anything in this guide applies to your workplace, we can help.

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This guide is general information about UK health and safety law and practice, correct as at 11 November 2026. It is not advice on your particular circumstances. The latest version is at https://integralsafetyltd.co.uk/blog/working-in-hot-weather-keeping-your-team-safe-and-hydrated.