

CIBSE Briefing

Keeping cool in a heatwave: top tips for building users

Here is some advice on how to cool down and be more comfortable at work in hot weather. Many of these you can do yourself: some may need help from colleagues or facilities managers.

Keep your workspace cool

- Turn off any unnecessary equipment, including lights, on or near your desk (turn off rather than to standby if possible, especially overnight) to reduce heat gains.
- Try to keep direct sunlight off you and your workspace – use window blinds if provided. If you cannot keep out of the sun, ask if shade can be provided or if it is possible to work in a more shaded area.

Keep yourself cool

- Within the limits of acceptable office dress, try to wear lightweight, breathable, loose clothing where possible. You can ask the management if they will relax any requirement for formal office dress in hot conditions.
- Drink plenty of fluids – warm or cool drinks help keep you cool better than very cold ones.
- Take your breaks in a cooler part of the building if possible.
- If you can, schedule physically demanding tasks for cooler parts of the day, i.e. early morning or evening.
- If your organisation has a policy on flexible working hours and/or home-working, try to vary your travelling times to avoid the rush hour or alter your hours of work to avoid working during the hottest part of the day. If these policies are not currently available, discuss their introduction with management.

Keep the workplace cool

- Check that the heating is switched off, especially during hot spells in the spring or autumn. Tell your facilities manager if it is still on.
- If your workplace is air conditioned, close the doors and windows so that it can work efficiently.
- If your workplace is not air conditioned, open windows can reduce the build up of humidity and increase air movement. You will get



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more air movement if you open windows on both sides of the building. In windy conditions it is better to have all the windows open a little rather than a few open wide.

- Portable or desk fans help give increased air movement and a local cooling effect where there is no air conditioning but remember to switch them off when you leave your desk.
- Avoid or reduce the use of non-essential heat and moisture producing equipment in break/communal areas, such as ovens, microwaves, coffee machines etc.

Thinking cool – tips for managers

- Ask your facilities manager to provide an action list for the building users of the best ways to keep the building cool – e.g., to open blinds again in the evening before leaving for home, or open secure ventilators etc.
- Think about providing 'chill out' zones, i.e. areas in the building that are kept cooler, with water available.
- Work pressures such as multiple deadlines and suddenly imposed changes in priorities are known to be stressful. Stress can contribute to physical discomfort, especially in hot weather, and decrease productivity. Where possible, schedule work well in advance.
- Lead by example, demonstrate tolerance, stay calm, cool and relaxed.
- Relaxing staff dress-codes (no ties, no jackets, short sleeves) during periods of hot weather can help improve comfort, productivity and staff morale. Make sure you lead by example.
- Additional short breaks for staff during hot weather can help them tolerate the conditions and remain productive.
- Request or review specific assessments for those who may be vulnerable during periods of hot weather.
- Where catering facilities are provided, consider the provision of cold menu lunches/evening meals rather than hot, which will help both diners and catering staff to stay cool.
- For advice for facilities managers visit:
www.cibse.org/content/heatwavebriefing1.pdf



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