Dealing with Summer Overheating in Schools

School Advice Note

Hot summers can be a problem in schools due to excessive indoor temperatures. This rise in temperature can be aggravated by the design of many buildings especially the glass and concrete constructions of the 1960s and 1970s. This advice note gives guidance to schools/ centres on the control of summer overheating. It should be communicated to all relevant staff and be incorporated into the schools/centres health and safety documentation as appropriate.

1. Is there a maximum temperature?

1.1 There is no prescribed maximum temperature at which action needs to be taken to lower temperatures. However, schools must ensure that that all reasonable steps have been taken to achieve a comfortable temperature. The Health and Safety Executive has issued guidance on thermal comfort which states an acceptable zone of thermal comfort lies roughly between 13°C (56°F) and 30°C (86°F).

2. What should we be doing to control summer overheating?

2.1 Plan for summer heat If you have a building that has historically overheated in the summer, being prepared can help to ease any discomfort felt by building users from overheating.

2.2 Monitor air temperatures Thermometers should be strategically placed around the building/s to monitor the air temperature. Feeling hot or cold is often subjective therefore having thermometers strategically placed in hot spots and other areas, will enable you to monitor the temperature and assist you in deciding whether rooms/areas, are excessively hot, and at which times in the day the room may overheat.

2.3 Provide adequate ventilation Ensure that all windows are capable of being opened and that all extractor fans and blinds are checked and in good working order. When excessive temperatures are forecast for the following day, lowering the blinds can help to reduce solar gain. To be effective this should be done in the evening, as it is less effective at midday when the sun is strongest.

2.4 Airflow can also be improved by keeping doors and windows open (where appropriate) to encourage the flow of air. In extreme cases consideration should be given to cooling areas, using temporary mechanical cooling units.

2.5 The safety implications of any equipment provided in this context must also be taken into account and a risk assessment undertaken. Aspects to consider include;

2.5.1 location to avoid blocking fire exits, gangways, etc
2.5.2 trip hazards created by trailing cables
2.5.3 manual handling of the equipment
2.5.4 provision of a suitable power supply
2.5.5 hired from a reputable source
2.5.6 likelihood of unauthorised use, tampering, vandalism etc
2.5.7 subject to portable appliance testing / general maintenance (if owned)
2.5.8 storage when not in use (if owned)

Note: Please be aware that fire doors should be kept closed at all times. Only fire doors fitted with automatic self-closing devices, which self-close in the event of a fire, can legitimately be kept open.

2.6 Prevent dehydration All building users should be encouraged to drink frequently in small amounts before, and after (during if appropriate) working or studying in overheated areas to prevent dehydration. All drinking fountains and other drinking water sources should be checked regularly to ensure they are operational. If appropriate, additional water should be supplied during high temperatures.

2.7 Identify cooler areas Discomfort is often exacerbated when individuals are unable to move to cooler areas. Therefore the amount of time staff and pupils spend in overheated areas should be limited. This can be achieved by:

2.7.1 organising breaks to cooler areas;
2.7.2 moving classes to cooler areas such as halls;
2.7.3 using known overheated areas only when the temperature is lower or at cooler times of the day;
2.7.4 holding classes or part of a class in a shaded area outside, if appropriate, and if temperature outside is cooler.

2.8 The governors and head teacher should make any decisions regarding the organisation of the school day (i.e. going to continental day timings).

Note: Secondary schools during the summer months are at an advantage in that some classrooms will be empty, as a number of students will be sitting examinations. If this is the case it may be easier to relocate classes away from problem areas.

3. What information should be given to pupils and staff?

3.1 Vulnerable persons Staff and pupils should be provided with information especially information about the risks associated with heat stress and the symptoms to look out for. In particular vulnerable persons, susceptible to heat stress should be identified. These include staff who have an illness/condition or are on medication, which may encourage the early onset of heat stress, e.g. pregnant women or those with heart conditions.

3.2 Protection from the sun - you can protect pupils and staff from the sun at break times by:

3.2.1 providing shady areas where possible;
3.2.2 encouraging the wearing of loose clothing that covers the upper arms and legs;
3.2.3 ask parents to provide sun hats or caps on hot days;
3.2.4 be particularly careful on sports days and visits when greater lengths of time are spent outside.

3.3 Sun cream The Governing Body/Head teacher should decide whether children are allowed to bring in sun cream. Please be aware of the following if you allow this:

3.3.1 Due to child protection issues (and not health and safety) staff are advised not to assist children to apply sun creams (mainly applies to primary schools).
3.3.2 Children should be discouraged from sharing creams.
3.3.3 For younger children schools should provide a storage area for creams.
3.3.4 Younger children should ideally be supervised when applying creams.
3.3.5 Pupils of all ages should be discouraged from bringing into school sun cream in spray and oils forms, as these are more easily abused.

4. Guidance

4.1 UK Health Security Agency have issued Guidance: Looking after children and those in early years settings during heatwaves: for teachers and professionals