

Hot air from ACAS on the UK heat wave

Article By:

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If you have been one of the many wilting at work in the Great British Heatwave of 2018 (or what I believe many other countries just call “summer”), panic not – Acas has issued [new guidance to help ease your working day](#).

Or not. Including such gems as “check with your local train company” to see if the hot weather will affect your journey to work, and the priceless “if you have air conditioning, switch it on”, it is hard to believe that any of these recommendations will revolutionise anyone’s heat wave experience, or that there are employers out there who won’t have taken these steps anyway to protect their staff as a matter of course. Besides, my local train company has no need at all of hot weather as a pretext to “affect my journey to work”.

That said, we all remember the excitement during our school days of its potentially being too hot or too cold to be in the classroom (almost as exciting as the urban legend that if a teacher was a certain number of minutes late for a lesson – no one seemed to know exactly how many – you were entitled to treat the lesson as cancelled) and so it is worth noting that Acas pours cold water on the grown-up version of this too. We hope the ground-breaking statement that “there will be times when the sun comes out and workers find themselves working in hot conditions” is tongue-in-cheek (but fear it may not be). There is a reminder, chilling in a way, that there is no maximum temperature that a workplace is allowed to be, other than that it must be “reasonable” (as per the guidance from the Health and Safety Executive), which will depend upon the type of work being done (e.g. work in a foundry vs working as an ice hockey referee). No legal maximum, maybe, but only the Tube and local train companies seem entitled to maintain temperatures at which it would be illegal to transport livestock without someone raising a sweaty eyebrow in the press. The Acas guidance also makes reference back to a separate publication about “thermal comfort”, which is not new but is quite interesting from the HR-science perspective – [it is apparently not about how hot it is, but how hot you feel](#).

Similarly, you might also hope that the advice to “employ common sense and flexibility” in terms of those workers who might suffer more during hot weather (e.g. pregnant workers, or those fasting for Ramadan) will not be news to employers. If it is, please do read the guidance. Otherwise, don’t worry. Really.

Finally, do remember that in very hot weather “a dress code can be used to ensure workers are dressed appropriately”. Sigh. More interesting might have been if Acas had provided advice on [how](#)

[to deal with employees with halitosis](#), given the BBC's assertion that excessive heat can cause dehydration so leading to increased incidence of bad breath. One for the Silly Season in 2019, perhaps.

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