

# Joint Union Heatwave Protocol

## Introduction

Recent years have shown that increasing extremes of weather are becoming more and more common. Sadly, climate change experts tell us that this is the shape of things to come – the climate crisis is going to lead to more frequent episodes of extreme heat – and schools and colleges need to be ready to deal with these on a more frequent basis than before. This protocol aims to help employers to work together with union reps to prepare for future heatwaves, so that learning is disrupted as little as possible and the health, safety and welfare of staff and pupils are protected. Such joint work also offers the opportunity to discuss adaptations to buildings that will save money on energy bills as well as ensuring comfortable working and learning conditions.

It takes account of guidance from **DfE, Acas** and **UKHSA** suggesting good practice for the short and longer term to help schools and colleges fulfil their responsibilities under health and safety legislation and in response to the climate crisis. DfE **Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care setting (publishing.service.gov.uk)** includes 'extreme heat' as one of the potential emergency scenarios that need to be planned for.

The following are short-term actions which schools and colleges should consider. They may not be appropriate in all circumstances, but can act as a useful guide for considering what could be done in response to extreme weather events.

## Short term planning

- ❑ Review weather forecasts and sign up to receive weather warnings from the **Met Office**. See below for an explanation of the different warnings.
- ❑ Share with staff what measures will be introduced once a heatwave has been announced. Scroll down for longer term planning suggestions – these will not come as a surprise to staff if the arrangements have already been the subject of consultation at an earlier stage.
- ❑ Curtail, so far as possible, heat-generating activities, for example, use of computer monitors, printers, Bunsen burners, ovens, and design and technology equipment, unless effective heat extraction measures can be put in place. Turn equipment completely off where possible as even leaving on standby will generate a certain amount of heat. Keep electric lights turned off unless absolutely necessary to have them on.
- ❑ Ensure easy access to drinking water for staff and learners with active encouragement to drink more than usual, both in and out of the classroom, preferably with reusable cups or bottles.
- ❑ Ensure easy access to toilets so that nobody worries about drinking 'too much' and not being able to leave the classroom or work area. This will include ensuring adequate staffing levels are in place in workplaces where additional supervision may be required.

- ❑ Ensure maintenance of extraction systems in kitchens and other areas and insulation of hot pipes.
- ❑ Relocate classes to cooler rooms whenever possible.
- ❑ Relax dress codes/uniforms for staff and learners. Recommend wearing light, loose clothing, such as the school's PE kit, with wide-brimmed sun hats for walking to and from school and when outside.
- ❑ Where staff and learners are outside, encourage use of sunscreens/sunblock with parents of younger children encouraged to ensure it is applied in advance of the school day.
- ❑ Implement planned changes to lunch menus, to benefit learners, staff and catering staff who should not be expected to prepare hot meals during a heat wave. This may require the school or college to work with the catering company where applicable.
- ❑ Ensure more frequent breaks for those working or learning in kitchens.
- ❑ Open windows to maximise ventilation during the cooler parts of the day, close curtains where this does not worsen ventilation or thermal absorption/conduction and use fans/air conditioning units where needed. Use oscillating mechanical fans to increase air movement if temperatures are below 35°C – at temperatures above 35°C fans may worsen dehydration.
- ❑ Remove vigorous physical activity from the timetable for learners and staff. Children may be better off indoors at break times if there is insufficient shade.
- ❑ Curtail outside work, e.g. gardening or other maintenance work.
- ❑ Avoid outside activities, such as PE and school trips, some of which may involve venues which will be likely to close anyway.
- ❑ Implement previously agreed changes to the working day such as starting early, finishing early or closing part or all the building, as determined by the risk assessment.

## Longer Term Planning

Education buildings need to be retrofitted or upgraded to help adapt to climate change – they need to be more resilient to heat and cold – and more energy efficient and ultimately net carbon zero. This is a challenge for Government and society and also an opportunity for pupils and adult learners to learn at first hand about adapting to climate change. Individual schools and colleges should approach their LA to find out what options are available in relation to retrofits, or use government grants if available. It may be that clusters of schools and colleges can work together to benefit from economies of scale. And there may be an opportunity to tackle the issue of asbestos at the same time. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-sector-decarbonisation-scheme>. Retrofits do not always need to be costly, capital-intensive projects. Fitting heat-reflective window coatings, or effective blinds can make significant improvements.

## Other longer-term measures

School and college employers should risk assess for extreme temperatures as part of their duties under health and safety legislation. This involves a longer-term proactive approach, as well as the ability to introduce immediate, short-notice relief measures. We advise that the following longer-term measures be considered:

- ❑ Development of shaded areas, for example through the planting of trees and bushes, the construction of shelters in playgrounds, or use of awnings. Growing plants inside also helps cool the air according to the UK Health Security Agency.
- ❑ Reviewing ventilation across the premises, including in kitchens (including extraction), and making any necessary improvements during the colder months.
- ❑ Checking that windows can be safely opened and ensuring that they are opened appropriately, e.g. as early as possible in the morning before learners arrive, or even overnight (security/insurance concerns permitting) to allow stored heat to escape

from the building and either kept open ajar or closed when the outdoor air becomes warmer than the air indoors. (In some new builds, particularly in heavily polluted areas, different ventilation systems may operate.)

- ❑ Fitting of external window shutters is worth considering. Where this isn't appropriate, heat reflective blinds and curtains will make a difference. Heat reflective films can also be applied to windows. Large unshaded south, west or east facing windows are those most in need of attention.
- ❑ Planning for which parts of the building may not be usable in extreme high temperatures (based on experience of previous heatwaves) and how this will be accommodated is very important. For example, it is likely that south or west facing rooms on upper floors will be hardest to keep cool.
- ❑ Planning suitable lunch menus for the second half of the summer term, or working with catering providers to do so, on the assumption that the weather will be hot. This will benefit both catering staff and those who eat the meals they prepare/serve. Or alternatively, planning for how short notice menu changes can be quickly made.
- ❑ Ensuring sufficient numbers of fans are available to be deployed where needed, also portable air conditioning units for the worst affected areas. (These are far from ideal in relation to environmental concerns but may be needed until such time as buildings are made more heat resilient.)
- ❑ Timetabling sports days and other outdoor events or activities for earlier in the summer or spring term and including contingency days.
- ❑ Planning for the possibility of needing to alter timings and advising parents that this may be the response in the event of extreme heat. This will need to be carefully balanced against any risks associated with changing start and finish times.

- ❑ Advance consideration of individuals who may have higher susceptibility to extreme heat (such as pregnant staff and those with certain underlying medical conditions) through individual risk assessments, covering issues such as room deployments, duties, home working (e.g. taking on other temporary duties from home for periods of heatwave) etc.
- ❑ Ensuring that all staff and learners are aware of the health risks of extreme heat, including the symptoms of heat stress, heat exhaustion and heat stroke so that they can recognise this in learners, and adults, and know how to respond (see **here** for further advice).
- ❑ Taking account of how Covid risks may interface with heat risks, for example in respect of ventilation and use of fans.

## **Notification of heatwaves - what the different Met Office alert levels mean**

### **Met Office Red Alerts**

A Met Office Red Alert indicates that it is very likely that there will be a risk to life, with substantial disruption to travel, energy supplies and possibly widespread damage to property and infrastructure. People should avoid travelling, where possible, and follow the advice of the emergency services and local authorities.

Where a Red Alert is issued for extreme heat, school and college employers must ensure that an immediate, additional risk assessment is carried out and the control measures indicated are enacted, which could include full or partial closure of the site, if the risk assessment deems this necessary. The risk assessment must also take account of travel to and from the site for learners and staff, and the potential for disruption to public transport systems later in the day.

## Met Office Amber Alerts

A Met Office Amber Alert indicates that adverse health effects are likely to be experienced by those vulnerable to extreme heat, with the wider population likely to experience some adverse health effects, e.g. sunburn or heat exhaustion. Travel delays are possible and there's an increased risk that heat-sensitive systems may fail. So, some changes to routines may be appropriate, following a risk assessment.

## Further useful resources

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### Acas

**Tips for employers to manage hot weather at work.**

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### HSE

**Temperature pages** (useful aspects to consider when carrying out a thermal comfort risk assessment).

The HSE offers **advice on how to carry out a thermal comfort risk assessment.**

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### UKHSA

**Beat the heat – keep cool at home checklist.** (This is about the home environment but the principles apply in a work/school/ college environment.)

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### DfE

**Looking after children and those in early years settings during heatwaves: for teachers and professionals.**

Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care setting ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))

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### TUC

**Too hot, too cold - Too hot, too cold** ([tuceducation.org.uk](https://tuceducation.org.uk)).