

# WORKING INDOORS IN HOT CONDITIONS

3 November 1997

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985, employers are required to provide and maintain, so far as is practicable for employees, a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. All managers of an area have a responsibility to ensure that their staff are not placed at risk of heat stress arising from their work or from the working environment, particularly during the summer months.

There is no single temperature above which individuals may be affected by heat stress as this depends on several factors including air temperature, air movement, humidity and workload. However, the air temperature (dry-bulb reading) is usually the dominant factor for workers who are not acclimatised, and the optimum indoor comfort range is between 21 and 26 degrees C. It is anticipated that high temperatures in the workplace will occur during summer and the OH&S Section can provide dry-bulb thermometers to areas on request.

## 2. RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervisors are required to:

- Consult and reach agreement with staff regarding control of heat stress
- Where agreement cannot be reached, consult the OH&S Section

Areas or work practices regarded as essential services should have a strategy devised beforehand to deal with heat stress (e.g. change of work practices, closure of services for a limited time, provide limited air-conditioning, etc.). Failure to do so may result in closure of the operations with the consequent disruption if heat stress is confirmed as occurring.

## 3. POLICY

The temperatures referred to below are dry-bulb readings in the work location, i.e. office, laboratory, or where the discomfort is experienced. When the indoor temperature exceeds 30 degrees C, an employee may approach their supervisor to evaluate suitable alternatives. These may include one or more of the following:

- Relocation to a cooler environment
- Taking regular rest breaks (e.g. 10 minutes per hour)
- Varying work hours (e.g. starting and finishing early to avoid mid-afternoon heat)
- Provision of fans to increase air circulation

When the indoor temperature exceeds 32 degrees C and staff cannot be relocated to an environment in which the temperature is less than 32 degrees C, staff should be allowed the option of leaving work without loss of pay.

#### **4. FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information and advice can be obtained from the Occupational Health and Safety Section, Room W137, David Myers Building, Bundoora Campus (Telephone 9479 2186). The OH&S Section also has copies of various legislation and publications.

Occupational Health and Safety Section