



# HEAT STRESS WEBINAR DISCUSSION SUMMARY

June 2023

*“Heat stress happens when the body's way of controlling its internal temperature starts to fail. As well as air temperature, factors such as work rate, humidity and work clothing may lead to heat stress.”<sup>i</sup>*

There is no UK maximum temperature limit for workers.

“However, all workers are entitled to an environment where risks to their health and safety are properly controlled. Heat is classed as a hazard and comes with legal obligations like any other hazard.”<sup>ii</sup>

## How do some FNET members deal with heat stress in their operations and supply chains?

- Altering shift patterns to earlier start and then later part of day when its cooler. This may affect workers with other/caring responsibilities such as childcare arrangements.
- For packhouses / offices (where businesses can afford) provide cooling systems / air conditioning.
- Mobile air conditioning when workers are moving to different areas so it can be moved around.
- Reviewing PPE in case it is creating heat e.g. rubber generates heat making it worse.
- In factories / packing halls etc. look at equipment that produces less heat.
- Allow workers to wear appropriate clothes to cool down e.g. can they have shorts and flip flops?
- Provide ice cream /lollies on hot days

## Overseas supply chains

- Some businesses have adjusted temperatures for food quality and need to adapt this for workers.
- Some businesses take predictive temperatures so that workers are informed in advance to come later or earlier depending on expected temperatures.
- PPE has been adapted in some countries e.g. big hats with screens.
- In Spain a strict guidance is being put in place so at temps of over 26-32 degrees people should have PPE. Above 32 degrees people will to be sent on breaks.

## Risk Assessments

- Incorporate heat as part of Health and safety risk assessments
- Many members have not seen heat stress explicitly mentioned as an issue, but would this be picked up in a SMETA audit interview?
- Sometimes there are additional factors that influence the exacerbation of heat stress e.g. in South Africa and load shedding makes it impossible to purify water for workers to drink in time.
- Climate change mapping is key for businesses because as the climate changes, there will be a need to determine where fruit can be grown and where it will be too hot.

## Recommended actions from case study on sugar cane workers in Nicaragua

- Regular breaks scheduled
- Adjustable, mobile shade tent that can move with workers
- Hydration – and providing workers with clean water to drink near work stations
- Having a member of staff who oversees that workers are okay
- Providing safe and clean sanitation in the fields (so workers do not restrict intake of water due to lack of facilities)
- International standard is workers **should not exceed their body temperature**

## Q&A (summary of meeting discussion)

### Is it better to give gels and isotonic drinks rather than just plain water?

Hydration is essential and if replacement of lost salts and minerals is required then it may be better to provide a good nutritious meal and water instead of gels and sugary drinks because of the knock-on health impacts in some populations of high-sugar drinks such as diabetes.

### How much how much water is required per worker?

People can over-drink, but if you drink 1 litre an hour it will be acceptable because workers are losing water from perspiration. The key is ensuring water is freely available and people are drinking. Recommended is to drink little more frequently. Also allow people to use the water to cool themselves – wash face etc.

## Resources

- [Presentation slides from FNET webinar on Heat Stress 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023.](#) Includes summary of pilot study by Adelante in Nicaragua and Member contributions from Dole UK and Gs Fresh.
- [Heat stress in the workplace; A brief guide \(2013\), Health & Safety Executive](#)
- [Resources developed by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\), \(USA\), including a heat safety tool app, information posters for workers, podcasts on how to protect yourself, recommendations for PPE.](#)
- [Cool it! Reps guide on dealing with high temperatures in the workplace \(2018\), TUC.](#)

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/heat-stress.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/heat-stress.htm>