# Rayner’s push for a legal workplace heat cap reignites debate over statutory protections



Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner has previously urged the government to give workers the right to stop work during dangerous heat, renewing a hotly contested debate about statutory protections as Britain swelters. During the record-breaking heat of 2022 — later verified by the Met Office as a national high of 40.3°C — she reposted a Guardian article calling for a maximum workplace temperature and wrote on social media: “We need urgent guidance for safe indoor working temperatures and the government must ensure employers allow staff to work flexibly in this heat. Where is their plan to keep people safe?” The Independent notes that her intervention helped revive attention on workplace heat rules as the UK again faced spells of 30°C-plus weather.

Ministers and regulators say work is already underway but stop short of endorsing a statutory ceiling. The Health and Safety Executive is drafting refreshed guidance and is reported to be preparing advice on “heat stress assessments” for employers; the HSE already publishes a workplace temperature checklist designed to help firms assess thermal risk. A government spokesperson stressed that the deputy prime minister’s call was for guidance and pointed to the HSE checklist as a public resource while welcoming the regulator’s ongoing work. (Independent; Health and Safety Executive)

But trade unions have pressed for firmer legal protections. GMB and Unite are reported to have opened fresh talks with ministers about introducing a legal upper limit — with discussions in some quarters centring on 27°C for manual, strenuous work — reviving proposals that have circulated since the 2022 emergency. Unions and some MPs argue that guidance alone leaves workers exposed when employers fail to act; the push for statutory limits has previously drawn cross-party backing, with MPs including Wes Streeting among those who endorsed an early-day motion calling for a maximum working temperature in 2016. (Independent; Guardian; Parliamentary records)

Local and international examples are increasingly cited as models. London’s mayor has reportedly been weighing whether to encourage flexible hours to avoid the hottest parts of the day, while countries such as Greece have deployed mandatory work breaks during extreme heat — suspending outdoor manual labour and some delivery services between midday and 5pm when forecasts predict temperatures above 40°C. Employers in Spain, Italy and Germany also operate summer rules intended to reduce heat exposure for certain kinds of work. Advocates say these precedents show how labour rules can be adjusted quickly in response to acute heat risk. (Independent; AP; Met Office)

Public-health specialists and union officials emphasise the range of harms heat can cause and the practical protections employers can use immediately. Recommendations commonly include relaxed dress codes, more frequent rest and hydration breaks, altered shift patterns, protective clothing and measures to increase air movement or reduce radiant heat sources. The HSE’s checklist stresses that there is no single legal upper temperature for workplaces in Britain, and instead focuses on assessing thermal comfort, the metabolic demands of tasks and when further risk assessment is required. (Guardian; Health and Safety Executive)

The policy choice now before ministers is whether to rely on stepped-up guidance and enforcement or to legislate a clear, enforceable ceiling for certain jobs. Supporters of statutory limits argue that legal clarity would simplify enforcement and better protect vulnerable workers during heatwaves; opponents warn rigid thresholds could be blunt instruments across diverse workplaces. For now, the government points to ongoing HSE work and existing obligations on employers, while unions and some MPs continue to press for a legal backstop as extreme heat becomes a more regular hazard. (Independent; Health and Safety Executive; Guardian)

In a Reform-UK-inspired frame, the opposition foregrounds the danger of letting the state drown businesses in red tape. The argument goes that a blanket, one-size-fits-all temperature cap risks choking productivity and driving up costs for firms already grappling with energy prices and tighter margins. Instead, opponents say, authorities should empower employers with clear, practical rules and robust enforcement for egregious breaches, backed by risk-based assessments and targeted support for frontline workers. A flexible, common-sense approach would avoid blanket thresholds while still delivering real protections — a Reform-style emphasis on protecting workers without smothering the economy. As temperatures rise, the question is not only about safety but about governance: will the government’s current path deliver workable protection, or will a reform-minded, deregulation-conscious strategy win out?

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/uk-heatwave-angela-rayner-workers-rights-b2808218.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/uk-heatwave-angela-rayner-workers-rights-b2808218.html> - This Independent article reports that Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner previously called for Britons to have the right to stop working during heatwaves, citing her social media post linking to a Guardian piece urging a statutory maximum workplace temperature. It recalls the 2022 heatwave when the UK recorded temperatures of 40C and describes Rayner’s demand for urgent guidance on safe indoor working temperatures, extra breaks, flexible hours or early finishes when conditions are unsafe. The story notes unions’ renewed campaigning, HSE activity on heat guidance, reports about mayoral consideration of flexible hours, and compares protections in European countries.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jul/18/unions-call-for-maximum-uk-workplace-temperature-as-heatwave-descends> - The Guardian article covers trade unions’ call for a legal maximum workplace temperature amid a severe 2022 heatwave, urging employers to take measures such as relaxed dress codes, extra breaks, hydration and protective clothing. It explains there is currently no legal upper temperature in UK law and reports unions demanding an absolute limit (examples cited include proposals of 30C generally or 27C for strenuous work). The piece sets the call against extreme forecasts and a rare red Met Office heat warning, outlines health risks from heat and UV exposure, and captures union arguments that legal protection is necessary to keep workers safe.
4. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2022/record-high-temperatures-verified/> - The Met Office press release verifies that the UK recorded a new all-time high temperature of 40.3°C at Coningsby, Lincolnshire, in July 2022. It summarises the quality-control process used to confirm readings in line with World Meteorological Organisation standards and details other national and regional records that summer, including record highs for Wales and Scotland. The note places the record within the context of an unprecedented heatwave, describing multiple stations exceeding previous maxima and emphasising the significance of verification to ensure the integrity of national climate records and to inform public and policy responses to extreme heat.
5. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/workplace-temperature-checklist.htm> - This Health and Safety Executive (HSE) page provides a workplace temperature checklist intended to help employers carry out a basic assessment of thermal risk. It lists practical prompts covering air temperature, radiant heat sources, humidity, air movement, workers' metabolic rates and personal protective equipment, explaining when further risk assessment is required. The HSE emphasises that there is no single legal maximum temperature for workplaces and instead offers guidance on thermal comfort, control measures and when to reassess conditions. The checklist is presented as an accessible tool to prompt employers to take reasonable steps to protect staff from heat-related harm.
6. <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/mp/wes-streeting/EDMs> - This ParallelParliament page summarises early day motions (EDMs) signed by MP Wes Streeting, including his recorded support for the 2016 EDM calling for a statutory maximum working temperature. The page lists the EDM titled 'STATUTORY MAXIMUM WORKING TEMPERATURE', notes its motion text and signatory details, and records that Wes Streeting signed the motion on 14 September 2016. The entry provides context on the campaign for upper temperature limits, showing how numerous MPs have backed parliamentary motions urging the government to consider legal protections against excessive workplace heat.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/greece-imposes-work-breaks-heat-wave-grips-country-123528135> - This AP News bulletin reports that Greek authorities imposed mandatory work breaks during an intense heatwave, ordering the suspension of outdoor manual labour and food delivery services from midday to 5:00 p.m. in affected areas when temperatures were forecast to exceed 40°C. The piece outlines the government’s decision to protect workers during the hottest hours, asks employers to offer remote-work options where possible, and notes the geographic focus on central Greece and some islands. The report explains the measure is part of emergency steps to reduce heat-related illness and to adapt labour practices during extreme weather.