EQUITY

National Heat Risk Commission:

Call for Evidence

October 2026

About

Equity is the largest creative industries trade union with 50,000 members united in the fight for fair terms and conditions across the performing arts and entertainment. Our members are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, models, stage managers, stunt performers, circus performers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, supporting artists and variety performers. They work on stage, on TV and film sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents.

Contact

For further information about this response, please contact Anna Shea, Policy Officer – Industry, ashea@equity.org.uk.

Questions

1. How is extreme heat, and its companion hazards of drought or wildfire, affecting your organisation, sector and the people you work with or serve? Please tell us about impacts on your workforce, customers, service users, communities, operations, services, assets, supply chains, productivity or costs.

The issue of heat and workplace safety is at the forefront of Equity members' concerns, especially after the extreme conditions of the last summer.

Equity members are exposed to dangerously high temperatures at work during heatwaves for which our buildings and infrastructure are not designed, including old theatres, outdoor venues, and stuffy sets. Add in costumes, lighting, physically demanding roles and long hours, and it is a serious challenge to maintain safe working conditions during a heatwave.

A survey of 296 creative and cultural organisations, undertaken by the Arts Council of England in July 2026, confirmed that the effects of extreme heat are being felt across the sector. 96% of respondents said that they were affected by the recent heatwaves, with less than 1% reporting that they felt very prepared for future such events.

3. What is your organisation doing to understand, prepare for and respond to extreme heat, and/or its companion hazards of drought or wildfire? This could include plans, policies, investment, changes to working practices, infrastructure, nature based solutions, data or climate information, and consideration of both current and future risk.

As a trade union, our principal response to these challenges is industrial. We organise and educate our members to empower them to demand safe working conditions, including regarding extreme heat. This includes our Activist Education Programme, which covers training on health and safety at work: Training for activists: Build your union skills.

Most of our work on extreme heat is encompassed within our Too Hot To Work Campaign, which has two principal strands: a heat mitigation checklist and the union's 10-step advice on staying safer in heat. We also have a third area of work, which is more campaigning / advocacy-oriented. Each of these are discussed in turn. For the first two strands (found here: Equity issues advice on working in the summer 2026 heatwave), we have included our materials verbatim.

1. Heat mitigation checklist

The best first step is to speak to your Equity Deputy and other cast and crew members about making collective requests for changes. Remember, the union is like sunscreen. For best results, make sure it's on everything.

How to use this heat mitigation checklist

1. Go through this checklist to identify what measures are already in place at your venue or production.
2. Use this checklist every day to track how your production is managing the heat.
3. Finish the week by completing the text box at the bottom to tell us what changes you managed to push for. Every time you complete the checklist, it will send you an email with a record of your answers, so you can keep track.

Remember that some people may be more at risk from heat than others – certain health conditions or types of medication can make you more vulnerable to heat stroke. Don't ask individuals about their health or perceived risk factors – but do remind everyone that any individual concerns can and should be risk assessed separately, respecting their right to privacy in conversations about their health.

Checklist

Date: _____

Which job / production and venue you are working on / at:_____

Record the temperature at your venue/on site:_____

- 24 degrees or above? – Use our heat mitigation checklist so the union can keep everyone cool.
- 27 degrees or above? – Equity believes this should be the cut off for strenuous work. Producers should conduct a risk assessment.
- 30 degrees or above? – Contact Equity urgently.

- ✓ Ask for a risk assessment to be undertaken and shared with the Company. Talk to your engager about the needs of your Cast or Company. Remember that some people may be more at risk from heat than others.
- ✓ Check if anyone is feeling unwell - heat exhaustion is serious and action should be taken to prevent them developing heatstroke.

- ✓ Do you have access to fans/aircon in all areas (e.g. dressing room, backstage)?
- ✓ Has strenuous choreography been minimised or changed?
- ✓ Have costumes and make up been altered/reduced?
- ✓ Have rehearsals been changed to avoid the hottest part of the day?
- ✓ Is cool water readily available?
- ✓ Is lighting rig – and any other sources of heat - turned off between performances, and only turned on when necessary? Do you have access to shade on outdoor sites?
- ✓ Is sunscreen available? Or if indoors, cool packs people can wear under the costume? Is UV being monitored?
- ✓ Speak to fellow cast and crew about the issue? Have you contacted your Equity Deputy?

Email Address:_____. Enter your email address to receive a copy of your completed checklist and so that we can build a picture of working conditions in the industry. We will not share any of these details with your engager or employer.

Tell us what changes you've requested to your workplace and what changes your engager has agreed to make:_____

Tick here if you'd like us to send you a thermometer: _____

2. 10-step advice on staying safer in heat

Advice for working during a heatwave in theatres, studios and outdoor performance spaces Working in a heatwave, high temperatures and/or direct sunlight.

Health and Safety Legislation does not state any maximum indoor or outdoor temperatures for work - but the law classifies heat as a hazard. This means there are legal obligations to assess heat as a risk whether working indoors or outdoors.

We believe that 27 degrees (°C) should be the cut-off for strenuous work – like performing a number in a musical in full costume. Alongside the TUC, we are calling for 30 degrees to be the absolute limit for work. As the climate crisis escalates, we are likely to face more frequent heatwaves and increasingly unsafe working conditions.

Below you can find advice for working in high temperatures and find out why we're calling for a maximum working temperature.

Circumstances for safe working are currently considered on a case-by-case basis.

Equity's 10 practical steps for members working in a heatwave

1. Talk to people! Don't keep your concerns to yourself. Make it a union issue by talking to your fellow cast and crew. If you've got an Equity Deputy, raise it with them. By collectivising the issue, you're making your voice stronger

2. Open a discussion with your engager to talk about the needs of your Company. Ask for a risk assessment to be undertaken.

3. Report immediately if you start to feel unwell - heat related exhaustion and illness is very serious and can escalate quickly.

4. Stay hydrated. A regular safe supply of cool water should be provided.

5. Heat mitigation measures when working:

   Stage/studio: To reduce heat on set/stage, ask if it's possible to minimise when the lighting rig is on before and after performances whenever practicable.

   Outdoor spaces: When dealing with hot weather at outdoor venues/locations, request adequate shade between scenes and an air-conditioned space for breaks and down-time.

   What about cold weather outdoors? Per the Health and Safety Executive's Approved Code of Practice (APOC), this also applies when working in sustained cold temperatures below 13°C (16°C indoors), request blankets and overcoats for in between scenes, and a heated space for breaks and down-time.

6. Performers and backstage workers in costume should open a discussion with the wardrobe department and designer about what can be done to reduce the weight and warmth of costumes. Take advantage of any breaks in action to take layers off.

7. Ask for strenuous choreography to be modified especially if there are company members starting to feel unwell.

8. Ask to structure rehearsals as much as practicable to avoid working (or at least strenuous physical work such as dance calls) in the strongest heat of the day. Persons involved in scheduling should minimise call times for those required to be in hot spaces and/or in costume.

9. Preparing your venue:

   For indoor spaces: Ask production management to liaise with crew/members of venue staff to ask if they could assist by turning on ventilation systems early instead of waiting until the show staff arrive. If ventilation systems are not available ask for fans or temporary air conditioning units to be installed.

   For outdoor spaces:
   - Whenever possible stay out of direct sunlight and find shaded areas.
   - Keep key parts of the body cool such as your wrists, feet and backs of the knees and neck. Request cool packs/cold compress where necessary.
   - Check UV levels daily and raise concerns with production where necessary. Always remember to wear sun cream with high UVA and UVB ratings and apply regularly.

60% of daily UV occurs between 10am and 2pm. Follow NHS guidance about when and how to apply sunscreen.
- Open a discussion with make-up teams about ensuring adequate sunscreen protection is incorporated within the required make-up application for your role, and that this protection can be maintained/reapplied where possible, per NHS guidelines, throughout the required period of outdoor working.

10. If you feel it will be too dangerous to work, please contact your Equity Official for support and advice.

Theatre Safety Committee guidance: Equity is part of the Theatre Safety Committee, which has published guidance for working during hot weather.

Get training from Equity on health and safety: Check back here for the latest trainings and resources on health and safety from Equity's education team. Contact training@equity.org.uk if your cast or company wants a bespoke H&S training for your workplace.

3. Broader campaigning and advocacy work

In parallel to the industrial response detailed above, Equity also campaigns on climate issues and actively seeks a greener, more sustainable industry for our members to work in. We are signatories of SPARK and the Bafta Albert clean energy initiative. We declared a climate emergency in 2021 and signed the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. We have developed the Green Rider for members to use and are negotiating to have it included as standard in the Pact agreement, covering the majority of UK film and television work.

The Equity for a Green New Deal Network fights for climate justice in our industries and beyond. Members can join up to get involved in campaigns including fighting for sustainable and accessible workplaces in live performance and recorded media, working to make our union as green as possible, and demonstrating solidarity with other workers who are fighting for a green and just future.

Equity is considering expanding our campaigning and advocacy in this area, to move beyond workplace mitigations and towards a more proactive, long-term response to rising heat, with the aim of ensuring workers' safety on an industrial and legislative level.

4. What has worked well, and what have you learnt? We are interested in successful approaches, lessons from implementation, and actions that have not worked as expected.

Equity has secured some positive mitigation measures, detailed in the following 2026 case studies provided by our activist members in the Live Theatre sector.

Case Study #1

- We're already doing everything we can over here and have been doing so for the last few days as the temperature has increased. Over the pandemic closure, the

producers had an air-cooling system installed in the auditorium, substage and on stage – everyone has really been feeling the effects of this new system and how it has made such a difference to everyone working in these areas. The system can be balanced so different areas have different temperatures and it really has changed things, especially with some of the cast being in hot and heavy costumes. This system has made a massive improvement from the hot summer we had a few years ago.

- We also have a couple of fans running on stage which are built into the lighting cues and show plots, so they come on and go off as necessary during the show. There are sections the fans can't run due to the low fog and style of the show; however, they do go back on as soon as that section is over. We're unable to have any large units in the wings, due to space and the noise levels created and being picked up by the microphones. Since we now have the air-cooling system, the need for these doesn't seem to be required.
- The SM [stage management] team have a freezer full of ice cream and ice lollies for the intervals over the next few days, along as and when the company would like one. We're also able to supply ice packs and rehydration tablets / sachets to company members if they require. Everyone knows they just need to ask a member of the SM team for any of these things as they have a good supply.
- The warmest places are the dressing rooms and we've got fans in most of these to keep people cool, we also have a supply of fans for use and people just need to ask for an additional one if required. Due to the nature of the show, the cast are usually only in the dressing room while getting ready and then come substage for the rest of the evening, we're not the type of show where they are returning often or for long periods of time. We are looking into getting some air-cooling units hired for the bigger dressing rooms and those which catch more of the sun. I've advised people in rooms to keep the windows closed and blinds down while it is so warm outside. As tempting as it is to open the window, this can make the room warmer and not help cool the spaces down.
- Everyone has been advised to allow additional time to travel and move around the building, along with staying hydrated throughout the day and if they feel unwell, to let either myself (Company Manager) or a member of the SM [Stage Management] team know straight away.

Case Study #2

- We have aircon units in the worst affected dressing rooms.
- We have fridges in every dressing room, most with freezer compartments so that individuals can chill water or isotonic drinks (which we will provide) and freeze bottles or water or wipes
- We have fans in every dressing room – often multiple fans, which we will turn on before the cast arrive at work
- We have provided tin foil to use for blocking out the heat from windows
- We have several water fountains, linked to the mains, in the building
- Everyone has access to ice packs
- We have been providing ice creams to cool and cheer
- The auditorium is chilled to 16 degrees and the lantern at the top of the building is opened so that air can flow through. The stage itself is not overly hot

- We have relaxed the costumes so that pullovers are not worn and blazers only when necessary for the action of the show
- Stage management and backstage staff have their blacks requirements relaxed and we are allowing people to wear shorts in this hot weather
- I'm assured that the lift has now been fixed from Saturday, so although it must not be used during the show, it will mitigate things pre-show.
- Additionally, for tomorrow's performance only, given the very high temperatures forecast and because there are fortunately no pre-bookings, the gentlemen in one dressing room will be able to make use of the chilled VIP Suite on substage level for costume changes, avoiding the need to go up the stairs just to change, which I know has been a frustration.

Case Study #3

- In a conversation yesterday afternoon we discussed putting pauses into the show, similar to what we did during the filming a couple of weeks back. They might last 2 or 3 minutes and enable the company to hydrate, to dry off to get some air from the fans before resuming
- I've suggested that if any weight could be taken out of the costumes or more likely the jewellery could be done as a temporary measure for today. If any alternate would rather wear an alternate costume rather than a principle costume, that would be ok too
- If it's possible for any of the alternates to play the second show that would great
- If there needs to be an unscheduled show stop at any point today, that can happen
- We have no problem the cast putting water bottles on stage close to the band members if that would be helpful

Case Study #4

- We have been monitoring the temperature in the venue last week and have carried out a risk assessment and we attach that here for you to read.
- I will be dropping off lots of instant ice packs, reusable ice packs (I'll pop those in the freezer sections above the fridges in [Name]'s dressing room, wardrobe and substage), rehydration tables and sachets and cooling patches
- Reducing costume layers or making adaptations to your costume where that may keep you cooler
- The theatre are hoping to have 9 air conditioning units delivered that will mostly be in the dressing rooms
- Some of the other measures they are implementing are having the air cooling system in the auditorium running 24/7 and are going to keep the iron in until the half with the lantern open so hot air can escape and air flow can be created
- We have spoken to the theatre about opening dock doors also but they feel given the air temperatures outside that this will draw hot air onto the stage and counteract what we are trying to achieve with the iron in and lantern open

Case Study #5

- When you arrive tomorrow you will find a number of instant cool packs, reusable gel ice packs (already in the freezer), rehydration tablets/sachets and cooling patches.

- The assessment suggests reducing costume layers or making adaptations to your costume. I know this has already started, but if you feel there are still further adaptations that can be done, please do come back to me and I can discuss with Wardrobe and the Supervisor/Designer if needed
- I have managed to convince the theatre to provide 12 portable air conditioning units, delivered tomorrow, that will be shared amongst the backstage areas and dressing rooms. Some of the other actions they are implementing is to have the air cooling system in the auditorium running 24/7, they will also leave the dock door open during the show to allow better air movement. The venue are also ordering and providing extra chilled water bottles to be distributed backstage, and this is all in addition to the extra fans provided in the last weeks
- If you are feeling any discomfort to let your line manager know as soon as possible

Case Study #6

- All the producer's venues have been giving permission to leave all aircon on constantly (24hrs continuous) so when I came into the theatre today its freezing in the auditorium and on stage. This will remain on during the performance also.
- All Dressing rooms at the theatre have air conditioning in each room for the occupants personal preference. Ironically all rooms except the company office.
- Our two most 'vulnerable' cast members I have arranged for the next two days private executive cars (air conditioned) to get them to and from home to work.
- Once the company exit the stage we have setup three very nearby 'cold rooms' – one at the rear of stage and two rooms in the wings with air conditioning and fans set to full.
- I'm currently looking at 40 x bottles of Lucozade still sports drinks and we also have 100 x electrolyte sachets to be handed out at warm up today if anyone wants to add one to their drinking bottles.
- We have plumbed in water fountains at stage door, stage level by the entry point and also on the top floor by the main ensemble dressing rooms.
- We also today as an extra precaution should be expecting two industrial aircon units to be placed on each fly floor with the air flow directed down and into each wing so we should hopefully have cool air falling from above during the performance.

Case Study #7

- We have implemented a number of additional measures over the last week which includes buying and hiring in additional cooling units for both the auditorium and backstage which has kept temperatures to workable levels. Ice packs and ice baths have been distributed as well as freezer units to dressing rooms.
- The theatre is on the brink of having its air conditioning system installed which all being well will be fully operational by tomorrow and we have been updating all members of staff on a daily basis before their warm up onstage.
- We had our company Equity visit on Tuesday and raised the issue about the lack of guidance for theatre managers and producers on limits of temperatures in the workplace. Our general management and producing team have been brilliant and proactive in keeping us safe but I know there are a lot out there in the industry who would not be. Therefore I do believe that by having an indoor and outdoor upper threshold it would hold theatres to account to make sure cooling systems are in place

for the safety of those they employ and stop unscrupulous producers forcing people to work in perilous conditions.

Case Study #8

- To confirm (as we have a matinee on a Friday) - we have already ordered air-con units which should arrive ahead of the very hot weekend. Our stage is thankfully already air-conditioned, as is our green room
- We have been communicating directly with the company with updates on movements to ensure a safe and comfortable environment (within in the limits of a very old theatre)

Case Study #9

- They've requested water bottles and ice lollies. The Production Assistant, representing the Producers, was also at this call and has organised the lollies and water to arrive tomorrow

7. What do you need from other organisations or institutions to become more resilient to extreme heat? This could include action from local, regional, national or UK governments, regulators, funders, infrastructure providers, professional bodies, suppliers or other partners.

The UK government should provide explicit guidance indicating that the protections in Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (which gives workers the right to withdraw from and refuse to return to a workplace that is unsafe), applies to situations of extreme heat.