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Freezing in the buildings



In the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis, the Administration decided to lower the temperature in the buildings to save costs. As a result, many colleagues are freezing in their offices, wearing their coats and shawl. We received many negative feedbacks from colleagues explaining that some offices are at 16 degrees at 8h00 in the morning and they reach 18° or 19° only at the end of the day!

Even if we can understand the effort of our Administration to save energy (as one of the main policies is also the 'Greening of the Commission'), working in a cold office has certainly a negative impact on the staff's well-being and efficiency. When the body is exposed to low temperatures, it goes into survival mode and diverts blood flow away from the extremities, including the hands and feet, to the core in order to keep vital organs warm. This can lead to feelings of cold, numbness, and discomfort in the fingers and toes.

In addition to physical discomfort, cold temperatures can also affect staff member's mental health and cognitive function. Cold environments can lead to feelings of stress and anxiety, as well as decreased motivation and focus. This can make it difficult for employees to complete tasks and make decisions, ultimately impacting their performance and productivity.

Furthermore, cold temperatures can also aggravate existing health conditions such as arthritis and asthma. It can also increase the risk of colds and flu by decreasing the effectiveness of the immune system.

Finally, after all the efforts made by the hierarchy to attract staff back to the offices following the Covid confinement, now these efforts are undermined by the unwelcoming environment in the offices.

Whereas the resistance to cold temperatures can vary depending on the individual's comfort level and clothing, it is important to note that:

- in Luxembourg, the Labour and Mines Inspectorate (ITM) imposes maximum and minimum values (ITM-SST 1814.1): the minimum temperature is 20°C for offices. Further, the minimum temperature must be reached before work begins each day. (Source: astf.lu and ITM)
- in Belgium, the “Code du bien-être au travail” Art. V.1-3.- § 1er defines a minimum of 18° in the offices. « Pour l’exposition au froid, les valeurs d’action d’exposition sont fixées en fonction de la charge physique de travail. La température de l’air ne peut pas être inférieure à 18° C pour un travail très léger » (Source : emploi.belgique.be)

Some may say that OIB/OIL can provide employees space heaters to help them survive in a cold office environment, but is this the path we need to take? Is this safe? What about the risks of such solution (e.g. fire risk, electrical overload...) ?

The Federation is asking:

- To immediately increase the temperature to offer the comfort of work and for the well-being of the colleagues at work, in particular to face the cold wave incoming these days. Alternatively and temporarily, offer 100% teleworking to colleagues wishing to stay warm at home.
- To ask external and competent experts to test the temperature in the offices in a professional way, in particular those on the last floors or in the corners of the buildings, making sure that the air in the offices is probed and not the air that is departing from the heating system.
- As a result of the probe, to quickly adapt to the temperature in buildings.
- **Overall: assure always the respect of the national laws: it is outrageous that the Commission is disregarding the rules of the hosting country!**

It may be more beneficial to invest in better insulation, more efficient HVAC systems or other energy-saving measures than lowering the temperature in the buildings! But also provide appropriate resources to help colleagues stay comfortable.

In conclusion, **the FFPE** asks the Administration should consider the potential costs for the health of its employees and safety risks before making a decision and revise its position on the actual situation colleagues encounter already for some time. While cost savings may be a factor, it is important to also consider the potential negative impact on colleagues' well-being and productivity.

The Federation

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