

Russian Employers Obligated to Cut Working Hours If Heat Above 30.5 C

July 30, 2014

The  Moscow Times

For those sweating away in sweltering Moscow offices without air conditioning this summer, the Russian labor service has some cool news: Employers must slash work days to a breezy four hours if indoor temperatures rise to 30.5 degrees Celsius, a news report said.

The Federal Labor and Employment Service, or Rostrud, has threatened employers with inspections and fines if they fail to either install air conditioning or cut back working hours, the head of the agency's labor law department, Yegor Ivanov said, Izvestia reported Wednesday.

Violations "would unambiguously be categorized as endangerment of life and/or health," he was quoted as saying.

According to an order issued by Rostrud, work days must be reduced by one hour if indoor temperatures reach 28.5 C, by two hours in 29 C, and by four hours in 30.5 C, Izvestia reported.

Ivanov argued that the measure was "in the interest of the employer," the report said.

"It's difficult to expect effective work from employees exhausted by heat," he said, adding that working in stuffy rooms can cause a flare-up of chronic ailments.

Rostrud orders said employers could also allow some of their staff to work from home and extend lunch breaks to let people go outside, the report said.

Maxim Ratnikov, an analyst at Taxadmin.ru business consulting firm, said research indicated that for every one-degree Celsius increase above 26 C, labor productivity falls by 10 percent, Izvestia reported.

"Besides, the responsibility for providing employees with normal working conditions is required by the Labor Code," he said. "If there is no money for air conditioning, let people go home."

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