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Source: WorkCover NSW

Skin Cancer and Outdoor Work—FAQ's

1. Why are outdoor workers at risk of skin cancer? Outdoor workers, both full and part time are a high-risk group for developing skin cancer because:

- ➔ the nature of outdoor work means workers often spend long periods of time in the sun all year round, receiving significantly more UV radiation yearly than indoor workers
- ➔ they also receive recreational sun exposure on days off, weekends and on holidays.

2. Why do I need to protect my skin? Australian has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. One in two people living in Australia will develop skin cancer during their lifetime. Australia's skin cancer rates are high because Australia experiences some of the highest levels of UV radiation in the world. Even on cool or cloudy days, UV radiation can be strong enough to damage skin.

3. How can I protect my skin?

When working outdoors The Cancer Council Australia recommends these simple steps to protect against sun damage.

Reduce exposure to the sun's UV radiation...

- ➔ work and take breaks in the shade
- ➔ where no shade exists, use temporary portable shade
- ➔ plan to work indoors or in the shade during the middle of the day when UV levels are strongest.
- ➔ plan to do outdoor work tasks early in morning/later in afternoon when UV levels are lower
- ➔ share outdoor tasks and rotate staff so the same person is not always out in the sun.

Slip on some sun-protective work clothing...

- ➔ cover as much skin as possible
- ➔ long pants and work shirts with a collar and long sleeves are best
- ➔ choose lightweight, lightly coloured material with a UPF 50+ rating
- ➔ choose loose fitting clothing to keep cool in the heat.

Slap on a hat...

- ➔ a hat should shade your face, ears and neck
- ➔ a broad brimmed styled hat should have at least a 7.5 cm brim
- ➔ a bucket style hat should have a deep crown, angled brim of 6 cm and sit low on the head
- ➔ legionnaire style hats should have a flap covering the neck & joins to the sides of the front peak
- ➔ if wearing a hardhat or helmet use a brim attachment or use a legionnaire cover.

Slop on SPF30+ sunscreen...

- ➔ no sunscreen provides complete protection so never rely on sunscreen alone
- ➔ choose sunscreen that is broad spectrum and water resistant
- ➔ apply sunscreen generously to clean, dry skin 20 minutes before you go outdoors
- ➔ protect your lips with a SPF 30+ lip balm
- ➔ always check and follow the use by date on sunscreen.

Slide on some sunglasses...

- ➔ be aware that your eyes can also be damaged by the sun's UV radiation
- ➔ wear close fitting, wrap around style sunglasses
- ➔ when buying new sunglasses, check the swing tag to ensure they meet the Australian Standard (AS 1067:2003 - category 2, 3 or 4) and are safe for driving
- ➔ look for an EPF (eye protection factor) of 10
- ➔ safety glasses that meet AS/NZS 1337 still provide sun protection
- ➔ polarised lenses reduce glare and make it easier to see on sunny days.

Remember to use the above steps together for the best protection.

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4. What is UV radiation?
The sun gives off many different types of radiation. One type of radiation is infrared radiation, which provides heat. Another type of radiation is ultraviolet (UV) radiation. UV radiation is not warm - we don't see it or feel it - but overexposure can lead to sunburn, skin cancer and eye damage.

5. How can I use the UV Index and the SunSmart UV Alert to limit my exposure to UV radiation?
UV radiation levels vary in strength across Australia on any given day. The UV Index is a rating system for the amount of UV radiation present in sunlight. The higher the number, the stronger the levels of UV radiation and the less time it takes for skin damage to occur. When the UV Index is at 3 and above, the level of UV radiation in sunlight is strong enough to damage the skin. The Bureau of Meteorology issues the SunSmart UV Alert whenever the UV Index is forecast to reach 3 and above. The SunSmart UV Alert appears on the weather page of all Australian daily newspapers and is available on the Bureau of Meteorology website. Go to www.bom.gov.au and do a search for "UV Alert". The time period displayed in the SunSmart UV Alert tells you when to use sun protection while working outdoors. And remember, extra care should be taken between 10.00 am to 3.00 pm when UV Index levels reach their peak.

6. What are the different types of skin cancer?
The three main types of skin cancer are:
➔ basal cell carcinoma (BCC)
➔ squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)
➔ melanoma.
BCCs and SCCs are the most common skin cancers and melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Outdoor workers are more likely to develop the common skin cancers on sun-exposed areas such as the head, neck, ears, lips, shoulders, legs and arms.

7. What are the other damaging effects of the sun?
In addition to skin cancer, prolonged and repeated sun exposure can result in the following:
➔ Skin damage
➔ sunburn (permanent damage can occur after 2 hours)
➔ keratoses or sunspots
➔ premature ageing
➔ wrinkles
➔ skin pigmentation and discolouration
➔ lip cancer.
Eye injuries and diseases
➔ inflammation and irritation
➔ cataracts - cloudiness of the eye lens
➔ pterygium (tur-rig-ium) an overgrowth of the white conjunctiva onto the cornea
➔ cancer of the eye and of the skin surrounding the eye

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8. How can I check my skin for skin cancer?

Early detection of skin cancer is important as skin cancer can be cured if treated early. All Australian adults should regularly look at their skin for suspicious spots, at least every 6 months. Get to know your skin; what is normal for you and what has changed since the last time you looked?

How to check your skin:

- ➔ check your whole body including the soles of your feet, between your toes, underneath your armpits, ears, eyelids, under your fingernails and scalp
- ➔ use a hand held mirror to check areas you cannot see such as your back, back of your neck and legs
- ➔ look for a new spot or a spot that is different from the ones around it
- ➔ look for a sore that doesn't heal
- ➔ look for a spot or mole that has changed in size shape or colour.

See your doctor as soon as possible if you notice anything unusual.

9. What can I do in my workplace to reduce exposure to UV radiation?

Health and safety legislation means your employer has a legal responsibility to provide a safe working environment.

If you work outdoors and your workplace doesn't offer any sun protection measures, raise the issue with your Health and Safety representative or manager.

This legislation also states that, as an employee you must cooperate with your workplace's sun protection program, so be sure to cover up against the sun.

If self-employed, it's in your best interest to look after yourself and use sun protection at work.

10. What are some common misconceptions about the sun?

➔ **Windburn**

There is no such thing as windburn. The wind may dry the skin but cannot burn it. What is described as windburn is actually sunburn.

➔ **High levels of UV radiation only occur on hot days**

Heat or high temperatures are not related to levels of UV radiation. Temperature relates to the amount of infrared radiation (not UV radiation) present in sunlight. We cannot feel or see UV radiation, so don't incorrectly use temperature as a guide to when sun protection is needed.