

Sun Safety - What Outdoor-Based Employees Should Know



Sun Safety Is Important !

Safety concerns such as preventing falls, trenching cave-ins, power equipment injuries, and lifting heavy loads represent just a few of the threats to health outdoor employees may commonly encounter. Safety personnel review, plan, and implement numerous protection measures related to construction, maintenance procedures, and other outdoor tasks to safeguard all staff. Yet sun safety is often neglected, despite the sun's dominant, daily presence in the sky.

This oversight persists despite the fact that one in five Americans is expected to eventually get skin cancer, chiefly caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation in sunlight. With over one million new cases expected this year, skin cancer is considered an epidemic. Each year there are more new cases of skin cancer than the grand total of new cancers of the prostate, breast, lung, and colon! In addition to skin cancer, exposure to sunlight can cause early aging (wrinkles and blotches), cataracts, and a weakened immune system.

Sunburns and tanning hurt the skin and serve as outward signs of internal skin damage. Health experts place UV rays in the same group as other cancer-causing agents like asbestos, arsenic, and tobacco smoke.



Skin Cancer Rates are Rising

The number of people who get skin cancer has greatly increased during the past 30 years for these and other reasons:

Florida is a Sun Belt state that – for outdoor workers and others – presents a high-risk environment for developing skin cancer.

- Modern clothing exposes more skin.
- Diminishing ozone, high in the sky that partially protects the earth's surface from receiving UV rays.
- Tanning is falsely viewed as healthy.
- General aging of the population.
- Many people have moved to sunnier states.

Three Major Forms of Skin Cancer

There are actually more than 200 types of cancer that may appear in the skin. The three major forms of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma (BCC), squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), and melanoma – the deadliest form. Skin cancer can develop anywhere on the body but most often appears on surfaces receiving the greatest amount of sunlight. BCC and SCC often take the form of a pale, wax-like, pearly bump or a red, scaly, sharply outlined patch. The patches may crust over, discharge pus, and sometimes bleed.



If not treated early, SCC may spread to other parts of the body. Less than one percent of people with SCC or BCC actually die from skin cancer. For many individuals, these two skin cancers cause some disfigurement based on the amount of damaged skin the physician must remove. Fortunately, skin cancer can be easily cured, in most cases, if the disease is treated in its early stages.

Malignant melanoma is the most dangerous type of skin cancer. It often arises from or near a mole. An individual should see his or her doctor (especially a dermatologist) if a mole or growth appears that has one or more of these features:

- If divided in half, the two resulting parts would have different shapes.
- It has jagged or rough edges.
- It has two or more colors (which may be mixed together).
- It is wider than a standard pencil eraser.

Melanoma often appears on parts of the body not regularly exposed to sunlight. While light-skinned people have a greater risk of getting melanoma, this disease is increasing among people of color. Melanoma often results in death if it moves into internal organs such as the lungs, liver, or brain.

Personal Risk Factors

While any individual can get skin cancer – regardless of skin color – light-skinned people are at highest risk. Individuals are more likely to develop skin cancer if they have one or more of these characteristics:

- Fair skin.
- Blue, green, or hazel eyes.
- Light-colored hair.
- Freckles.
- A tendency to burn rather than tan.
- A history of severe sunburns.
- Have many moles (over 50).
- A personal or family history of skin cancer.
- Outdoor worker.

Timing and Environmental Sun Safety Issues

UV radiation is more intense under certain time frames or conditions:

- From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- When there is lack of thick cloud cover.
- From mid-spring through mid-fall (also during winter at higher elevations).
- At higher altitudes.

It is important to remember that outdoor work environments – especially between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., from March through October – can be likened to a **radiation chamber**. Also, reflective surfaces like snow, water, and glass can direct additional UV rays toward people.



Cover up!



Sun Safety Announcement for Employees



- This year there will be over one million new cases of skin cancer in the United States, chiefly caused by *UV rays in sunlight.
- Left untreated, skin cancer can eventually cause serious scarring, disfigurement, and even death.
- Protect yourself from the sun today:
(Choose the items that are practical. . .)
 1. Wear a wide-brimmed hat.
 2. Wear long, light-weight clothing to cover your skin.
 3. Apply SPF 15 sunscreen to exposed skin.
 4. Wear UV-protective sunglasses.
 5. Use lip balm with a SPF 14 or greater.
 6. Work or take breaks under shade, when available.
 7. Drink plenty of water to help stay cool.

* UV – Ultraviolet Rays.

