

Sun protection for outdoor workers



People who work outdoors in Australia receive up to 10 times more sun exposure than indoor workers, placing them at higher risk of skin damage and skin cancer.¹ Because of this higher risk it is recommended outdoor workers use sun protection all year.

Under OHS legislation, employers must protect all workers – including casual and contracted employees – from UV damage.

It is estimated 200 melanomas and 34,000 basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma skin cancers diagnosed each year in Australia are the result of workplace UV exposure.²

Between 2000 and 2012, there were 1,970 workers compensation claims for sun-related injury/disease in Australia, at a total cost of \$63 million in compensation payments.³

UV radiation and workplace exposure

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. This is due – in part – to our high levels of UV radiation, which is the major cause of skin cancer. All skin types can be damaged by overexposure to UV rays. Damage is permanent, irreversible and adds up with each exposure to increase the risk of skin cancer.

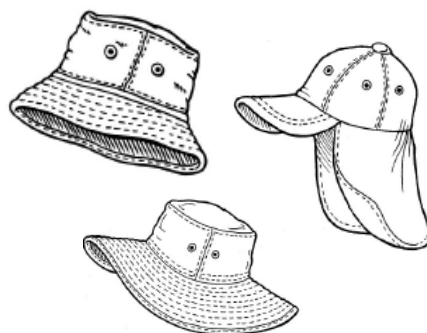
Workers are exposed to UV directly from the sun. UV can also be reflected off different surfaces and scattered by particles in the air.

Protect your skin at work

UV radiation isn't like the sun's light or heat, which can be seen and felt. Outdoor workers need to use sun protection every day, all year-round, no matter the temperature.

1. **Slip on clothing** that covers as much skin as possible. Long pants and collared, long-sleeved shirts are best.
2. **Slap on SPF 30** (or higher), broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen. Re-apply every 2 hours or more if sweating. There are sunscreens available specifically for outdoor work that will not leave marks on equipment.

3. **Slap on a hat** that shades the face, ears and neck. Use a brim or legionnaire-style attachment on hard hats.
4. **Seek shade** during breaks or move outdoor tasks to a shady spot where possible.
5. **Slide on** close-fitting, wrap-around style **sunglasses**. Check the swing tag to check they meet the Australian Standard for UV eye protection – AS/NZS 1067 or AS/NZS 1337 for safety glasses.



Broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire hats offer protection for the face, ears and neck.

Employer responsibilities

As part of their OHS responsibilities to provide a safe working environment, employers should:

- have a UV protection policy or written guidelines documenting control measures that are endorsed by senior management;
- provide information, instruction and training about UV radiation to workers;
- provide UV protection control measures in line with occupational hazard controls. These may include shade, modifying reflective surfaces, rescheduling outdoor work programs, and providing PPE (broad-brimmed hats, sunglasses, sunscreen)⁴ and sun-protective clothing;
- implement a monitoring and review process to determine the effectiveness of control measures and identify changes that may further reduce exposure.⁷

Employees must co-operate with their workplace's efforts to ensure their own health and safety, and that of other people.



Sun protection for outdoor workers

Tax deductions may be available for sun-protection products if you are required to work outside. Talk to your tax advisor or contact the Australian Taxation Office on 13 28 61 or visit ato.gov.au

Checking for skin cancer

Most skin cancers can be successfully treated if found early. Because of their increased skin cancer risk, it is important all outdoor workers get to know their skin to help them find changes earlier.

Check all of your skin for changes, not just skin exposed to the sun. See your doctor as soon as possible if you notice any change in size, shape or colour of existing spots or any new spots.

More information and resources

SunSmart offers UV Safety training on the hazards of UV exposure, sun protection in the workplace and early detection of skin cancer for workers and/or for OHS representatives and management. These sessions help workplaces meet their health and safety obligations. To book a training session, contact SunSmart on (03) 9514 6419 or visit sunsmart.com.au/work.

UV-protective clothing and accessories can be purchased at Cancer Council Victoria's shop or online at www.cancercouncilshop.org.au

References

- 1 Godar DE. UV doses worldwide. *Photochemistry and Photobiology* 2005; 81(4): 736–49.
- 2 Fritschi L, Driscoll T. Cancer due to occupation in Australia. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 2006; 30(3): 213–9.
- 3 Safe Work Australia. Workplace compensation data. Canberra, Australia. National Data Team, Safework Australia, 2014: 3.
- 4 Cancer Council Victoria. *Skin cancer and outdoor work: A guide for employers*. Cancer Council Victoria: Carlton, Victoria 2009.

This information is based on available evidence at the time of review. It can be photocopied for distribution.

Updated: August 2017