

Sun protection for outdoor workers



Outdoor workers in Australia receive up to 10 times more sun exposure than indoor workers, placing them at an increased risk of skin damage and skin cancer.¹ Because of this cumulative exposure, outdoor workers require year-round sun protection.

Employers have a crucial and legislated role to play in protecting all workers – including casual and contracted employees – from ultraviolet (UV) radiation damage. Developing a comprehensive workplace sun protection program will assist in the protection of workers.

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 are 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.

Occupational exposure to UV radiation

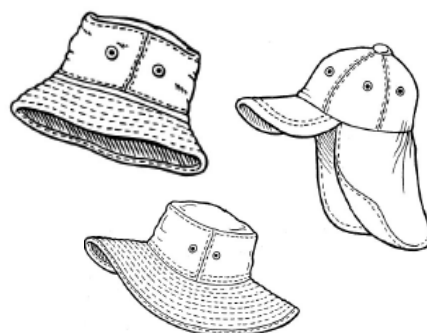
Occupational exposure to UV occurs by direct sun exposure, as well as via reflective surfaces and scattering of UV through the atmosphere.

It is estimated that approximately 200 melanomas and 34,000 basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma skin cancers diagnosed each year in Australia are due to exposure to UV radiation in the workplace.⁵ A total of 1,970 workers' compensation claims for sun-related injury/disease were made in Australia between 2000 and 2012, at a total cost of \$63 million in compensation payments.⁶

Protecting workers

Victorian health and safety legislation requires employers to provide and maintain a working environment that ensures the health and safety of all workers.

Consult with workers and/or representatives to develop a comprehensive workplace UV protection program. Employees must co-operate with their workplace's efforts to ensure their own health and safety, and that of other people.



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

Outdoor workers require year-round sun protection to reduce their cumulative UV exposure and skin cancer risk. Workplaces with outdoor workers should:

- develop 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 include shade, modifying reflective surfaces, rescheduling outdoor work programs, and providing personal protective equipment (broad-brimmed hats, sunglasses and SPF30 or higher, broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen)⁷ 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

Tax deductions are 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.



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Early detection of skin cancer

Most skin cancers can be successfully treated if found early. Employees should be encouraged to:

- get to know their own skin
- check all of their skin for changes, not just skin exposed to the sun
- see their doctor as soon as possible if they notice any change in size, shape or colour of existing spots or the development of any new spots.

Further information and resources

SunSmart offers 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.

Skin cancer and outdoor work: A guide for employers outlines the relationship between UV exposure, skin cancer and outdoor work, and provides workplaces with information to address workplace sun protection. This booklet is available from the SunSmart website along with other workplace resources including: guidance material, a risk assessment tool, sample policies and information for workers. Visit sunsmart.com.au/work or contact SunSmart on (03) 9514 6419.

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

References

- 1 Godar DE. UV doses worldwide. *Photochemistry and Photobiology* 2005; 81(4): 736–49.
- 2 Staples MP, Elwood M, Burton RC, Williams JL, Marks R, Giles GG. Non-melanoma skin cancer in Australia: the 2002 national survey and trends since 1985. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2006; 184(1): 6–10.
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- 4 Fransen M, Karahalios A, Sharma N, English DR, Giles GG, Sinclair RD. Non-melanoma skin cancer in Australia. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2012; 197(10): 565–8.
- 5 Fritschi L, Driscoll T. Cancer due to occupation in Australia. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 2006; 30(3): 213–9.
- 6 Safe Work Australia. Workplace compensation data. Canberra, Australia. National Data Team, Safework Australia, 2014: 3.
- 7 Cancer Council Victoria. *Skin cancer and outdoor work: A guide for employers*. Cancer Council Victoria:Carlton, Victoria 2009.

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

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