



Sun protection for outdoor workers

The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a serious health and safety hazard, especially for people who work outdoors. Australia has some of the highest levels of UV radiation in the world and daily UV exposure adds up to increase your risk of cancer.

People who work outdoors in Australia receive up to 10 times more UV exposure than indoor workers, placing them at higher risk of skin damage and skin cancer.^{1,2} Because of this higher risk, it is recommended outdoor workers use sun protection all year.

It is estimated 200 melanomas and 34,000 other skin cancers diagnosed each year in Australia are the result of workplace UV exposure.³

In Australia from 2010/11 to 2018/19, 1208 workers compensation claims for skin cancer were accepted at a total cost of \$32.8 million.⁴

UV radiation and workplace exposure

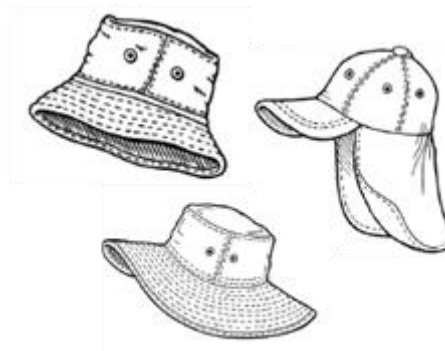
Under Victorian occupational health and safety legislation, employers, self-employed people and those with management or control of workplaces have a duty to protect health and safety by conducting their undertaking in a way, and providing and maintaining a working environment, that is safe and without risks to health. This includes risks that are associated with harmful levels of exposure to UV radiation that can lead to skin cancer.

Protect your skin at work

Unlike the sun's light and heat, UV radiation can't be seen or felt. It can reach you directly and indirectly – scattered by particles in the air and reflected by ground surfaces such as metal, concrete, sand and snow.

Outdoor workers need to use sun protection every day, all year-round, regardless of the temperature.

1. **Slip on clothing** that covers as much skin as possible. Long pants and collared, long-sleeved shirts are best.
2. **Slop on SPF30** (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 help shade the face (including nose, cheeks and chin), 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.⁴

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

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. If you notice any new spots, changes in the size, shape or colour of existing spots, or a spot that looks different to others around it, see your general practitioner (GP) as soon as possible.

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.

For more information, visit sunsmart.com.au or contact Cancer Council on 13 11 20.

For more information about how to protect your skin, visit sunsmart.com.au/protect-your-skin

Certain health conditions and medications mean some people are more sensitive to UV radiation and always need to use sun protection regardless of the UV levels. For more information, visit sunsmart.com.au/skin-cancer/risk-factors-for-skin-cancer .

References

1. Godar DE. UV doses worldwide. *Photochemistry and Photobiology* 2005; 81(4): 736–49.
2. Gies P, Wright J. Measured solar ultraviolet radiation exposures of outdoor workers in Queensland in the building and construction industry. *Photochem Photobiol.* 2003 Oct;78(4):342-8. doi: 10.1562/0031-8655(2003)078<0342:msureo>2.0.co;2. PMID: 14626661
3. Fritschi L, Driscoll T. Cancer due to occupation in Australia. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 2006; 30(3): 213–9.
4. Safe Work Australia. National Data Set for Compensation-based Statistics (NDS). Available at <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/national-dataset-compensation-based-statistics-3rd-edition-revision-1>, Canberra Australia; March 2020.

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