



Risk Control

Sun Exposures for Contractors Bulletin

The sun is a great source of vitamin D and has vital, mood-boosting abilities. However, overexposure can potentially damage the human body by causing heat stress, heat stroke and skin cancer. It is important to learn how to stay cool and protect yourself from overexposure.

Stay Cool with the Right Clothing

Staying cool and protecting employees from overexposure to the sun begins with selecting the right clothing. Loose, light-colored clothing is much cooler than tighter, dark-colored clothing. Workers can also stay cool by wearing long-sleeve shirts and pants to shield their skin from the sun's rays. Ultimately, these tips will reduce the amount of sun exposure, which helps maintain a lower internal temperature.

The following are examples of appropriate clothing and their benefits:

- Cotton fabric - Cotton clothing helps soak up sweat and stays wet longer, thus keeping heat from penetrating the body. It also exposes the sweat to the atmosphere, allowing for easier evaporation.
- Opaque clothing - Opaque clothing serves as a layer of protection, preventing the sun's light and ultraviolet (UV) rays from penetrating the cloth. This is beneficial in keeping employees cool and protected.
- Loose, flowing garments - Loose fitting clothing allows maximum breathability and air flow to assist in cooling the skin and the body.

- Light-colored clothing - The sun is absorbed by darker colors, retaining heat. Wearing lighter colors will help reflect the sun away from the surface of the clothing, thus, keeping the body cooler.

Skin Cancer and Major Risk Factors

Did you know that UV rays are most intense during the peak working hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.? These harmful beams can damage and mutate DNA, causing several types of skin cancers. Because of this, one in five Americans will develop skin cancer in the course of a lifetime.

Major risk factors for skin cancer include:

- Genetics/family history
- Fair skin/freckles
- Sunburns at a young age
- People who are in the sun multiple hours per day

Stay Protected from Damaging UV Rays

Wearing long sleeves on the job not only keeps employees cool, but it also keeps their skin protected from damaging UV rays.

The most common way to stay protected from the sun is to wear sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 30. With sunscreen, employees should reapply every two hours or less, depending upon the amount they are sweating.

Another way to combat skin cancer is to wear long-sleeve clothing rated at a UV protection factor (UPF) of 15 or higher. Having UPF-rated clothing means that UV rays are less likely to penetrate the material compared to clothing with no UPF. Not only will it protect, but it will also keep employees cool.

On top of wearing sunscreen and protective clothing, employees taking breaks in the shade, natural or artificial, or use personal protective equipment (PPE) to create shade directly on the body. An example of this would be a large brimmed hard hat, or a hat with an attachable brim.

Lastly, it's important not to forget sun protection for the eyes. Malignant melanoma, a form of deadly skin cancer, can often be found in the eye. Wearing sunglasses with UV protection can prevent this.

Resources

- <http://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts>
- https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_Hurricane_Facts/working_outdoors.pdf
- <https://www.skincancer.org/prevention/sun-protection/prevention-guidelines/guidelines-for-outdoor-workers>
- <http://www.skincancer.org/prevention/sun-protection/clothing>
- <http://www.skincancer.org/prevention/are-you-at-risk/the-sun-construction-site-hazard>
- <http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/cancer-and-construction/skin-cancers.htm>

Things to Remember

- Stay hydrated.
- Wear SPF 30 sunscreen, and reapply often.
- Choose light-colored, loose fitting clothing.
- Consider long-sleeve shirts with a UPF factor of 15 or more.
- Wear long pants.
- Choose sunglasses with UV protection.
- Take breaks in the shade.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine and large amounts of sugar.
- Avoid drinking large amounts of alcohol the night before work.
- Be aware of your body and your environment.

Find additional tools and resources to help reduce risks and exposures, visit www.cna.com/riskcontrol.