Guidance for fieldwork leaders

Managing the risks from sun exposure

Whilst the link between sun exposure and skin cancer is well known, evidence shows skin cancer cases are increasing. People who regularly work outdoors for long periods are at increased risk of developing occupational-related skin cancer.

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health estimates that **outdoor workers** can be exposed to over **80% more UV radiation** than indoor workers.

The invisible hazard

Sun exposure is often an invisible hazard which may not be fully considered when planning fieldwork and outdoor work.

Many people underestimate their own risk of sun exposure and often fail to protect themselves adequately.

Young people aged 15 to 30 are less likely to use sunscreen or adopt behaviours that would reduce sun exposure.

Planning fieldwork and field trips

Take account of the environment and likely conditions you will be working in and consider whether there is a risk of UV exposure when you carry out your fieldwork risk assessment.

Aim to organise the work in ways to reduce sun exposure and identify measures your staff and students should take to protect themselves outdoors.

bristol.ac.uk/safety/occupational-health/workplace-health/sun-check/

Planning beforehand ensures you have the correct arrangements in place.

Field Leader Sun Checklist

The following checklist is designed to help you identify measures you can implement as part of your fieldwork planning and ensure risks have been assessed and sensible arrangements made to reduce sun exposure to fieldworkers.

1. Check the UV level you will experience

Before the field trip, check the likely UV index for the time of year and area you plan to visit. Locations that regularly experience moderate (>UV03) UV levels will need precautions to protect fieldwork participants.

During the field trip, check the weather forecast and look for the local UV index. Adjust your work plans accordingly.

2. Adjust your plans to avoid exposure

When UV levels are moderate or higher, can you plan your work to avoid or minimise working in direct sunlight and during the middle of the day?

Be aware that participants will have different skin types that react differently to the sun – some people will be more at risk from exposure than others.

3. Adapt work to reduce exposure

Will the locations you are visiting have shaded or indoor areas that you can use during breaks?

If working in areas with high UV levels, can you reduce the length of time participants are working directly in the sun or swap tasks so everyone gets a break in the shade during the day?

4. Protect workers who are driving

If fieldworkers need to drive for significant periods, can you add UV protective tints or laminated films to vehicle windows?

UV radiation can penetrate plain glass windows and still cause damage to skin.

5. Make sure fieldworkers cover up

Make sure participants wear hats that shade the face, head, ears and neck. If you need to wear safety helmets, use those with Legionnaire-style neck flaps.

When UV levels are high ensure participants are wearing long-sleeved, loose-fitting tops and trousers – many outdoor clothing suppliers offer Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) clothing ranges.

6. Eyes need protection too

Participants should wear sunglasses with 100% UV protection. Look for glasses labelled as UV400 with CE and British Standard marks on the label.

Sunglasses that provide protection at the side of the eye (wrap-around styles) are best. If your work requires you to have physical eye protection like safety goggles, use UV filtering models.

7. Monitor sunscreen application

Make sure participants use sunscreen on skin that cannot be protected by other means, like the hands, face and lips.

Sunscreen will not protect skin on its own and should be used together with other measures. Make sure everyone has regular access to a broad spectrum, factor 30 sunscreen with a UV rating of 4 or 5 stars and knows how to apply it correctly.

8. Check for team susceptibilities

Is anyone in your team particularly susceptible to sun? Does anyone in your field team suffer from photosensitivity?

You may need to consider additional precautions to protect them.

Remember

Before you travel, make your field team aware of sun exposure and provide them with information about the possible risks.

- Let participants know how the work will be organised to reduce their sun exposure.
- Explain why the protective measures you identify are important for their health.

- Highlight the level of UV they might experience.
- Ensure they consider how their own skin type might impact their exposure.
- Encourage them to check their skin for moles and other changes.
- Tell them what precautions they can take to protect themselves.