Guidance for outdoor work

Managing the risks from sun exposure

The link of between skin cancer and sun exposure is well known and workers who regularly spend long periods outdoors are at increased risk from over-exposure to UV radiation.

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health identifies **grounds** and **landscape** management; **horticulture**, **agriculture,** and **rural** activities; **sports** and **outdoor** leisure occupations as some of the employment areas **at most risk**.

The invisible hazard

Workers in the UK often underestimate their own exposure as people assume our climate is not hot enough or sunny enough to cause harm. In fact, even on overcast days there can be enough UV radiation to damage skin.

1,700 people are diagnosed with skin cancer caused by sun exposure at work in the UK every year, and skin cancer kills more men than women.

Managing the risks: Sun Checklist

This checklist is intended to help anyone responsible for assessing or managing the risks posed by outdoor work to identify measures that can be put in place to reduce the risk of harm to those involved in these activities.

1. Check if workers need to take precautions

Check the weather forecast to find out the UV index.

Provide this information to workers and make sure they know what actions to take so they are protected from sun exposure when UV levels are moderate or high (UV03+).

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

Can the work be carried out under cover or sunshade? These can reduce UV exposure significantly.

Do staff have access to shaded or indoor areas that they 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 workers need to drive for a significant period during the day, add UV protective tints or laminated films to the vehicle windows.

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

5. Make sure staff cover up

Make sure workers 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

Workers 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 workers 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

Make everyone involved in the work aware about 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.