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## Skin cancer - protecting outdoor workers

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### Summary

- Outdoor workers are in one of the highest risk groups for skin cancer.
  - Your employer has a duty of care to protect you from overexposure to UV radiation.
  - Talk to your employer about introducing sun protection measures to the workplace.
  - Never rely on sunscreen alone. Use a combination of sun protection measures – slip, slop, slap, seek and slide.
  - If possible, schedule outdoor work early in the morning or late afternoon to avoid periods of high UV.
  - Download the SunSmart app to check what the UV level is each day.
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Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. At least two in every three Australians will develop skin cancer before the age of 70. Around 2,000 Australians die each year from skin cancer. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the main cause of skin cancer.

Exposure to UV occurs by direct sun exposure, by reflection from surfaces (such as concrete, white paint and snow) and by scattering of UV through the atmosphere. All skin types can be damaged by overexposure to UV. Damage is permanent, irreversible and increases with increased exposure to UV radiation.

### Skin cancer and sun protection in the workplace

Outdoor workers and their employers have a shared responsibility to make sure that workers are protected from the sun to minimise the risk of **skin cancer**. Victorian health and safety legislation requires employers, so far as reasonably practicable, to provide and maintain a healthy and safe working environment, and requires employees to adhere to safety practices.

Having a comprehensive sun protection program, which includes a range of simple protective measures, can prevent sun-related injuries and reduce the suffering and costs associated with **skin cancer** – including reduced productivity, morale and financial returns.

It is recommended that employers implement a range of measures to reduce workers' exposure to UV radiation, such as:

- providing information, instruction and training for workers about UV radiation and protection
- providing sun protection control measures in line with occupational hazard controls – modify reflective surfaces, reschedule outdoor work programs, provide personal protective equipment and clothing (broad-brimmed hats, sunglasses, clothing, sunscreen, shade)
- developing a sun protection policy that documents control measures, and that is endorsed by senior management
- implementing a monitoring and review process to determine the effectiveness of control measures and identifying changes that may further reduce exposure
- conducting periodic assessments of the UV exposure risk to all workers.

Guidance for employers on developing and putting into place a UV protection program, including a policy template, is available from **SunSmart** and **WorkSafe Victoria**. Contact your state or territory's Cancer Council to find out more about the UV protection services available.

Tax deductions are available for sun-protection products for those who work outside. Talk to your tax advisor or contact the Australian Taxation Office on **13 28 61**.

### Protecting outdoor workers from the sun

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There are various ways to reduce exposure to the sun for outdoor workers. Sunscreen alone is not enough. The **Australian Work Exposures Study (2016)** showed that although sun protection was used by 95 per cent of Australians outdoor workers exposed to the sun's UV radiation, only 8.7 per cent of workers were classified as fully protected (using protective clothing and a hat, being aware of peak UV times and avoiding being outdoors in the middle of the day where possible).

Don't just wait for hot and sunny days to use sun protection – UV is damaging all year round for outdoor workers, even on cool, cloudy days.

When working outdoors try to:

- reschedule work, where possible, outside of the peak UV times in the middle of the day to minimise UV exposure
- provide and use shade, including for break times
- provide and use protective clothing (long sleeves, collared shirts, broad-brimmed hats, hard hat attachments and sunglasses)
- advise and remind outdoor workers to apply broad-spectrum, water-resistant SPF30 or higher sunscreen and reapply every two hours.

### **Outdoor workers and checking for skin cancer**

Due to the high risk of skin cancer among those who work outdoors it is important that they check their own skin regularly for skin cancer. Most skin cancer can be successfully treated if found early. But without treatment, some skin cancer can become deadly very quickly.

Get into the habit of **checking your skin** regularly to help you find changes earlier.

Check all of your skin, not just sun-exposed areas as melanoma can appear anywhere (including under nails, genitals and bottom of the foot). If you notice anything unusual, including any new spots, or existing spots that change shape, colour or size or a spot that bleeds and won't heal, visit your GP as soon as possible.

As an outdoor worker it is important that you are informed about:

- the need to check your own skin
- the importance of becoming familiar with how your skin normally looks so you can notice any changes
- how to examine your skin
- what to look for
- what to do if you notice a suspicious spot.

### **Where to get help**

- **WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service** Tel. **1800 136 089**
- **Cancer Council Victoria Helpline** Tel. **13 11 20**
- **Multilingual Cancer Information Line**, Cancer Council Victoria Tel. **13 14 50**
- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Local community health centre
- Your occupational health and safety officer

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