

# Sun protection

## Explain dangers

At some point, we've all been burned by the sun. Sunburn is the effect of ultraviolet (UV) radiation on the skin. UV light beams down on us every day. But now there's less protective ozone in the atmosphere and the risk of exposure has increased.

UV rays are more powerful than visible light rays. They're so powerful that they can cause cancer.

Sunlight is the main source of UV radiation known to damage the skin and cause skin cancer. Exposure to the sun's UV radiation is a highly preventable cause of skin cancer.

The more time you spend in the sun without UV protection, the higher your risk becomes of developing skin cancer.

Melanoma is the least common but most dangerous type of skin cancer. The incidence of melanoma in men is rising faster than all other cancers.

The mortality rate from malignant melanoma is also increasing, particularly in middle-aged males.

In addition to cancer, UV radiation can cause cataracts, other eye damage, and premature aging of the skin.

When you work in the sun, especially in the spring and summer, you need to minimize the hazards of UV exposure.

## Identify controls

- Wear a shirt and long pants to cover most of your skin. Tightly woven material will offer more protection. Wet clothing loses some of its ability to block out the sun's rays.
- Protect any exposed skin with sunscreen. Don't forget your ears and the back of your neck. Use an SPF of 30 or higher and apply it 20 to 30 minutes before going out in the sun.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours or as often as recommended by the manufacturer. The more you sweat, the more often you need to reapply.
- Use a UV-blocking lip balm and reapply every two hours. Skin cancer can develop on lips.

- Protect your eyes. Wear UV-absorbent safety glasses (e.g., CSA-approved polycarbonate glasses) or safety sunglasses. Even clear safety glasses will decrease your UV exposure.
- Find a shaded area for your breaks and lunch.
- Avoid contact with substances known to cause photosensitization such as coal tar.
- SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. Multiply the SPF by 10 to know how many minutes you can stay in the sun without burning.
- Examine your skin regularly for any unusual changes such as a spot on the skin that is changing size, shape, or colour.
- Sunlight doesn't have to be direct to do damage. Light reflected off surfaces such as sand, water, concrete, and snow also cause UV exposure.
- Sunscreen should be standard equipment for anyone working outdoors during spring and summer months. Keep a bottle handy in your toolbox.

### Did you know?

Weather reports now include a UV index. This gives you an idea of how intense the ultraviolet radiation will be under clear sunshine or light cloud.

When the index is high (7 or higher) you can get sunburned in only 15 to 20 minutes. The highest exposure is from noon to 2 pm.

## Demonstrate

Pass around bottle or tube of sunscreen (30 SPF or higher) and ask crew to apply it to exposed skin.

Ask them about any risk factors they have for developing skin cancer. These include:

- Fair skin that burns easily
- Blistering sunburns in childhood and adolescence
- Family history of melanoma
- Many freckles and moles on skin.