

STEWART RICHEY

Safety Snapshot by Mike Smith, Safety Field Supervisor

Sun Exposure

As a profession that primarily works outside, we spend long hours outdoors exposed to the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. This puts us at a significantly higher risk for developing skin cancer compared to other professions. In fact, studies show construction workers are two to three times more likely to develop skin cancer than the general population.

The dangers cannot be overstated. Unprotected UV exposure causes damage that accumulates over time, leading to skin cancers like melanoma, basal cell carcinoma, and squamous cell carcinoma. Melanoma is the most serious form and can be life-threatening if not detected and treated early. Non-melanoma skin cancers may be less deadly but can still require disfiguring surgeries.

Protecting yourself from UV exposure needs to be a daily practice on jobsites. Use the following tips to prevent skin cancer:

- Use broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher and reapply it frequently, especially if sweating.
- Cover up by wearing lightweight, long-sleeved shirts, pants, and a hat with a wide brim.
- Seek out shade whenever possible during breaks.
- Check your skin regularly for any suspicious spots, moles or changes and report them promptly.
- Avoid tanning beds and sun lamps which also expose you to harmful UV radiation.

Skin cancer is one of the most preventable forms of cancer, but only if we take the proper precautions. Having leathery, sun-damaged skin may seem like a badge of honor for construction workers, but the consequences are disastrous. Don't risk developing skin cancer - make sun safety an integral part of your daily routine on every jobsite. Follow the prevention tips and your future health will thank you.