



COMMUNICATION
WORKERS UNION

Health risks from working in the sun

Simple Guidelines to help protect you from the Damaging Rays of the Sun

People, whose job keeps them outdoors for a long time, could get more sun on their skin than is healthy for them. Such people can be at greater risk of skin cancer. The problem is caused by the ultraviolet (UV) rays in sunlight. This leaflet is to provide some basic information to help you protect yourself.

What are the dangers?

In the short term...sunburn can blister **your** skin and make it peel, but even mild reddening is a sign of skin damage. **In the long term...**too much sun will speed up the ageing of **your** skin, making it leathery, mottled and wrinkled, but the most serious effect is an increased chance of developing skin cancer.

Abnormal reactions to sunlight

Some medicines, contact with some chemicals used at work (such as dyes, wood preservatives, coal-tar and pitch products), and contact with some plants, can make **your** skin more sensitive to sunlight.

Who is at risk of skin cancer?

Some people are more liable to skin cancers than others. People with white skin are at most risk. Take particular care if you have:

- Fair or freckled skin that doesn't tan, or goes red or burns before it tans;
- Red or fair hair and light coloured eyes;
- A large number of moles - over 100 in young people, or over 50 in older people.

Workers of Asian or Afro-Caribbean origin are at almost no risk of skin cancer from sunlight.

What can I do to protect myself?

Even if **your** skin is not fair and freckled, you should still be particularly careful while you are working out of doors in the summer in the three or four hours around midday. The sun is most intense at these times. Even on cloudy days, UV can filter through.

Some Dos and Don'ts to avoid the dangers are:

- Do try to avoid the mild reddening which is a sign of skin damage as well as being an early sign of burning;
- Minimize sun exposure **Do** try to work and take **your** breaks in the shade if you can - this will reduce **your** risk of harming **your** skin and also help to **keep** you cool; During the hours of 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (11 am to 3 p.m. daylight saving time) when the sun is strongest.
- Don't be complacent; get to know **your** skin's most vulnerable areas (e.g. back of neck, head) and **keep** them covered;

- Don't try to get a tan - it's not a healthy sign. It might look good but it indicates that the skin has already been damaged. A suntan does not eliminate the long-term cancer risk, which is associated with prolonged exposure to the sun; nor will it protect against premature ageing.

Clothing

Cover up. Ordinary clothing made from close-woven fabric, such as a long-sleeved work shirt and jeans, will stop most of the UV. Choose lightly woven materials for greater protection from the sun's rays. Wear a hat - A wide-brimmed hat will shade **your** face and head, the areas, which suffer most from sunlight. **A safety helmet will provide some shade for the head.** A hanging flap can protect the back of **your** neck if you work leaning forward.

Keep your shirt or other **top** on, especially while you are working around midday. Don't be tempted to leave it off, even if **your** skin tans easily and does not burn. The use of UV absorbent lenses may be useful to some people who need to look into the sky for long periods. **Eyeshields Sun Glare Protection** will provide protection against UV and glare.

Sunscreens

Individuals at high risk for skin cancer (outdoor workers, fair-skinned individuals and people who have already had skin cancer) should apply sunscreens daily.

Hats and other clothing are the best form of protection, but sunscreen creams and lotions can add useful protection for parts of **your** body that are not easy to shade from the sun.

BT provide all engineers with sun bloc, this can be obtained via the normal stores ordering procedure **Item Code 003286.**

If you are using your own sunscreen then look for a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of 15 or more. Read the supplier's instructions on how it should be applied. Don't forget the backs of **your** hands. If you develop an allergic reaction to your sunscreen, change sunscreens. One of the many products on the market today should be right for you.

Beware of reflective surfaces!

Sand, snow, concrete and water can reflect more than half the sun's rays onto your skin; Sitting in the shade does not guarantee protection from sunburn

Check your skin

The first warning sign is often a small scabby spot, which does not clear after a few weeks. Look for changed or newly formed moles or any skin discolouration. It is normal for new moles to appear until you are about 18 years old. As an adult you should pay particular attention to any growths, which appear on the face, especially around the nose and eyes, or on the backs of the hands; you should show **your** doctor any moles, which grow or change or start to bleed.

If you notice any of these signs consult **your** own doctor, Show them this leaflet and explain that you have an outdoor job.

Fortunately most of these signs will be harmless, but medical checks may be needed to be sure. Even if a spot is cancerous, simple modern treatments can usually cure it and most don't spread to other parts of the body. The smaller the spot the easier it is to cure. So don't put off going to the doctor when you know you should.

If you have any kind of medical check-up tell the doctor that you have an outdoor job and ask if there are any suspicious signs on **your** skin.

Don't delay.