

Be Safe in the Sun

With summer in our midst, the lure of beachwear and sun-soaked tans lure most of us outdoors. For the construction industry, projects kick into high gear to take advantage of more reliable weather and favorable conditions. So it's easy to forget the dangers of the sun. Studies have found that those working in the construction field can be exposed to 10 times the National Health and Medical Research Council's recommended daily exposure to UV radiation.

Many Americans don't realize that skin cancer is the most common cancer found in the United States. According to a 2007 fact sheet from the American Academy of Dermatology, "more than 1 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States this year and 1 in 5 Americans will develop some form of skin cancer during their lifetime."

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation found in the sun's rays has been proven to increase the risk of developing certain types of skin cancer by causing mutations in skin cells. Outdoor workers are at an increased risk due to overexposure. It's important to protect yourself by liberally applying sunscreen throughout the day, covering up with clothing, hats, and sunglasses, and finding shade whenever possible.

Remember having a tan doesn't provide any real protection against the sun and neither does having darker colored skin. In fact, a tan causes the skin to thicken and form the color pigment enzyme melanin. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a substantial number of Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians burn in the sun, as well as some

African-Americans depending on skin color and family history.

Reapplication is key

One of the most common mistakes people make is using too little sunscreen and only applying it once before heading out into the sun. To adequately cover and protect yourself, apply a shot-glass full of sunscreen at least 20 minutes prior to sun exposure and reapply the same amount every few hours. Active ingredients in sunscreen penetrate the skin better if put on when the skin is still damp, so apply on after you shower.

Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of at least SPF 15, which protects against 93% of UV radiation. Not every sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays, so look for a "broad spectrum" sunscreen that blocks both. Remember a sunscreen cannot block 100% of UV rays and regardless if the product claims to be water- or sweatproof, inevitably throughout



Workers should apply a shot-glass full of sunscreen 20 minutes before working in the sun. Photo: Jenni Spinner

the day the sunscreen will be rubbed or toweled off. Reapplication is key. Finally, don't forget your lips. Wear a lip balm with SPF 30.

When in doubt, cover up

Covering exposed skin as much as possible can add another line of defense against harmful UV rays. Choose a medium to dark color, tightly woven fabric for better results. Or wash your clothes in Rit Sun Guard, a laundry additive that increases clothing's ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) rating. Donning hats and sunglasses will help protect the head, face, and eyes as well.

Seek shade

Construction sites can reduce UV exposure to jobsite workers by limiting work during peak hours when the sun is at its strongest, between 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Complete outdoor tasks early or late in the day and share work across employees to minimize an individual's exposure. Provide artificial shade over work areas, such as awnings, umbrellas, roofing materials, and shade cloths, to help reduce exposure when work remains in direct sunlight.

Get checked

Skin cancer is treatable when detected early. Get regular skin checks from your doctor and keep track of any spots or moles that are new or recently changed in color, size, and shape. If you notice any changes, see a doctor for further evaluation. Don't forget your back or hard-to-reach places. Have a family member or close friend look for you.

— Kate Hamilton