Working in Adverse Weather – Sun Safety

This document provides guidance for employers on understanding the risks associated with ultraviolet (UV) radiation and appropriate control measures to manage sun safety when employees are working outdoors.

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Introduction

Working in the sun may expose employees to potentially harmful levels of ultraviolet (UV) radiation which can cause immediate and long-term health risks.

Skin cancer rates have continued to rise globally over recent decades, making it one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers worldwide. This increase is largely attributed to cumulative exposure to UV radiation from the sun, changes in work and leisure patterns that increase the time spent outdoors, and improved detection and reporting. Occupational groups with regular outdoor exposure are at particular risk, as repeated UV exposure over time can lead to cellular damage that may not become apparent for many years. The upward trend in incidence highlights the growing importance of prevention, early identification, and effective control measures to reduce avoidable exposure and long-term health impacts.

Employers have a legal duty to assess and manage risks associated with occupational UV exposure so far as is reasonably practicable. Both employers and employees share responsibility for recognising the risk associated with sun exposure and for taking appropriate action to mitigate the risk. This guidance examines the effects of sun exposure on employees, outlines the associated occupational health risks, and provides practical recommendations for employers on implementing effective control measures to protect employee health during outdoor work.

Ultraviolet Radiation

There are three types of Ultraviolet radiation: UVA, UVB and UVC that are emitted by the sun as part of the light spectrum. UVC is generally blocked by the Earth's atmosphere, however UVA and UVB rays are not, and these can cause cumulative, long term damage to the skin.

UVA rays are present during daylight hours and can penetrate through clouds and glass. They can cause long term damage including skin cancer as well as ageing the skin and causing sun spots and wrinkles.

UVB rays are the primary cause of sunburn and can cause DNA mutations that lead to most skin cancers.

Ref: Cancer Research UK

Health Risks

UV radiation can pose a range of both short and long-term health risks, particularly affecting the skin and eyes. The risks can increase with the duration and frequency of exposure, and it can accumulate over time.

As the effects of UV radiation are often delayed and irreversible, effective recognition, assessment, and management of work-related UV exposure are essential to protect the long_term health of employees.

Prompt identification and intervention can significantly influence treatment outcomes and improve overall prognosis.

- **Skin**
  Excessive exposure to UV radiation from the sun can damage the DNA in skin cells. Solar erythema, more commonly referred to as sunburn is a resulting injury of this cellular damage. Sunburn does not always present as extreme redness, blistering or peeling. In individuals with darker skin tones, sun damage can appear as irritation, warmth, itching or tenderness. In individuals with lighter skin tones, sunburn may also cause the skin to become pink or red following sun exposure.

  UV radiation damage can build up over time and cause cells to develop beyond control, which can lead to skin cancer.

- **Eyes**
  UV radiation from the sun can have both short and long-term effects on eye health. Exposure can cause damage to the surface, cornea, and lens of the eye, and can significantly increase the risk of developing cataracts, a condition in which the eyes lens becomes clouded which can cause blindness.

Policy

A workplace sun safety policy should include a clear commitment to managing UV exposure risks and be underpinned by a formal risk assessment that identifies high-risk roles, tasks, and environments.

In addition to establishing defined operational controls and preventative strategies such as the scheduling of outdoor activities to minimise exposure during peak UV radiation periods, the policy should serve as a framework for workforce education. Specifically, it should outline training requirements aimed at improving awareness and promoting early recognition of sun-related health risks, including the identification of initial signs of skin damage and potentially harmful dermatological changes.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are essential for health and safety management. Their main purpose is to prevent harm through providing a systematic methodology for identifying hazards, evaluating their potential impact, and determining whether existing controls are in place to protect employees and others, or whether more needs to be done.

Key considerations when assessing working outdoors in respect of sun safety include but are not limited to:

- Duration of work,
- Frequency of work,
- Cumulative exposure,
- Location of work including access to shaded areas,
- Time of day,
- UV level,
- Reflected surfaces that can increase UV exposure e.g. water, metal,
- Employees at greater risk e.g., those with medical conditions, personal history, medication, those who have undergone radiotherapy/chemotherapy, and skin tone which may increase their susceptibility to sun_related ill health.

Also consider those undertaking driving roles who can be exposed through activities outside the vehicle, for example when completing deliveries but also potential UV exposure through vehicle glazing and open windows.

Employee involvement in the risk assessment process is essential to ensure that controls reflect work actually undertaken rather than assumed practices.

Risk assessments should be documented, kept under regular review, detail the control measures required to mitigate the exposure, and effectively communicated with those potentially exposed to the risk.

Dynamic risk assessment plays a critical role in managing sun safety by enabling workers and supervisors to continuously evaluate changing environmental conditions, such as UV index, weather variability, and duration of exposure. This real-time appraisal supports timely implementation or adjustment of control measures. By embedding dynamic risk assessment into daily operations, organisations can enhance responsiveness to changing risks and effectively mitigate cumulative exposure and associated health impacts.

Training and Awareness

Effective training and awareness programmes help to ensure that workers understand the risks associated with UV radiation exposure and the measures required to mitigate them. Training provides the opportunity to reinforce the control measures identified within the risk assessment whilst at the same time provides an opportunity to highlight the early warning signs of sun damage, including subtle changes such as skin irritation, tenderness, or unusual pigmentation.

Increased awareness enables workers to recognise early signs of sun damage and encourages timely reporting and intervention. Embedding sun safety education within occupational health frameworks supports a proactive safety culture and contributes to the long-term reduction of UV-related health risks.

Health Surveillance

Health surveillance for outdoor workers may form a component of occupational sun safety management, providing a structured approach to the early identification of adverse health effects associated with cumulative UV exposure. It should be proportionate to the level of assessed risk and focused on the detection of early skin changes, enabling timely intervention and reducing the likelihood of progression to more serious conditions, including skin cancer. Regular monitoring may include visual skin examinations, supported by clear reporting pathways for workers to raise concerns about new or changing lesions.

The risk assessment should determine proportionate health surveillance requirements. Health surveillance must be carried out by a competent occupational health professional.

Incident Reporting and Continuous Improvement

Effective incident reporting is a fundamental element of managing sun safety in the workplace, enabling organisations to capture and respond to instances of overexposure, sunburn, or observed skin changes.

Incident reports provide organisations with a formal record of work-related events pertaining to UV exposure. These records enable employers to identify patterns and analyse trends over time, with the insight gained supporting the identification of areas where existing controls may be insufficient and where alternative or enhanced risk management measures are required.

Reporting processes also contribute to a culture of openness and shared responsibility, where workers are encouraged to report concerns without hesitation. This is particularly important for sun safety, where the effects of exposure may not always be immediately severe, but can have cumulative and long-term health consequences.

Weather

Monitoring weather conditions and forecasts, in particular UV levels, is crucial when planning outdoor work. UV radiation can impact workers even when the sun may not appear strong, 90% of UV rays can pass through clouds. If employees are working abroad the same principles apply but consideration needs to be taken assessing whether altitude and the proximity to the Equator will affect the level of exposure.

Because forecasts are not always fully predictable, frequent weather checks from a reliable source should be undertaken to help reduce risk and improve preparedness. Forecasts should be obtained from a trusted, and frequently updated, source such as national meteorological services, which helps employers and employees stay informed about sudden changes. Employers should consider the accessibility of weather-related information e.g.; mobile weather apps may make it easier to check updates regularly.

The UV index provides information on how strong the UV rays are at a given time. The higher the UV index number, the less time it can take for skin to be damaged by the sun. The sun is strong enough to cause damage when the UV index is 3 or above, however, it is important to consider protecting your skin throughout the day. Care should be taken for individuals with greater susceptibility, such as those with fair skin as they may experience damage more rapidly and require enhanced protective measures.

Work activities should allow for flexibility during periods of elevated UV levels. Safe working procedures should define when additional control measures are necessary and specify thresholds at which work may need to be suspended under extreme conditions. The implementation of dynamic risk assessment can further support these procedures by enabling informed, real-time decision-making in response to changing environmental conditions.

Managing the Risks

Work Scheduling

Outdoor working environments can be challenging to manage from a sun-safety perspective due to their inherent and variable nature. However, employers should still consider how the physical work environment can be adapted to reduce the risk of UV exposure, for example by providing shaded areas such as canopies. In addition, shaded or cooled areas should be provided for rest breaks and for activities that do not require outdoor working, such as meetings or task planning.

Effective work scheduling is another critical control measure. Tasks that require prolonged outdoor exposure should, where possible, be planned outside of peak UV periods. Implementing earlier start times or later shifts can significantly reduce cumulative exposure to harmful radiation. This approach not only lowers the risk of sunburn and long-term skin damage but can also improve overall comfort and productivity.

Job rotation can further support exposure reduction by limiting the amount of time any individual spends in direct sunlight. Alternating workers between shaded, indoor, and outdoor tasks supports a safer work pattern. This should be supported by clear planning and supervision to ensure rotations are effective and do not inadvertently increase risks elsewhere.

Individuals working in glasshouses or driving vehicles are also at increased risk of UV exposure as UVA rays can penetrate glass; standard side and rear vehicle windows, in particular, do not block these rays. Therefore, it is important to ensure this exposure is considered and are included within the protective measures outlined above.

Welfare Facilities

Adequate welfare facilities are essential to support safe working practices and enable effective rest breaks. Employers should ensure ready access to clean, potable drinking water to maintain hydration, along with suitably shaded or sheltered rest areas where workers can recover away from direct sunlight and heat.

Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) may support mitigating the risks associated with occupational sun exposure in outdoor work environments. PPE may include garments with a high ultraviolet protection factor (UPF), broad-brim or neck-protective headwear, and UV-rated safety eyewear, all of which help reduce direct exposure to harmful solar radiation. Selection of PPE should be based on the level and duration of exposure, as well as the specific work environment.

It is essential that sun-protective PPE is fully compatible with other required safety equipment, such as hard hats and high-visibility clothing to ensure that overall safety is not compromised.

While PPE can play an important role in reducing sun exposure, it should be considered a supplementary measure, with more robust controls such as elimination, substitution, and engineering or administrative controls prioritised wherever reasonably practicable.

Sunscreen

Sunscreen should be considered as a supplementary control measure to reduce the harmful effects of UV radiation in outdoor work environments. Employers should clearly specify minimum performance requirements within their safe working procedures to ensure an appropriate level of protection is achieved e.g., a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 30 or higher (UVB protection) and a star rating of 4 or 5 (UVA protection).

Consideration must also be given to the potential for individual sensitivities or allergic reactions to sunscreen ingredients. As a result, a more suitable approach in some cases may be to reimburse or expense sunscreen purchases, allowing workers to select products that are compatible with their skin type while still meeting defined minimum protection standards.

Checklist

A generic Working in Adverse Weather – Sun Safety Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

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Sources and Useful Links

- IOSH Sun Safety Guidance
- HSE Skin at work: Outdoor workers and sun exposure
- NHS Sunscreen and sun safety
- WHO SunSmart Global UV App
- Cancer Research Melanoma skin cancer

Relevant Loss Prevention Standards include:

- Dynamic Risk Assessment

To find out more, please visit Aviva Risk Management Solutions **or speak to one of our advisors.**

Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666.*

*The cost of calls to 03 prefixed numbers are charged at national call rates (charges may vary dependent on your network provider) and are usually included in inclusive minute plans from landlines and mobiles. For our joint protection telephone calls may be recorded and/or monitored.

Appendix 1 - Working in Adverse Weather – Sun Safety Checklist

Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Working in Adverse Weather – Sun Safety	Y/N	Comments
1.	Do you have a policy for working in the sun?		
2.	Has a risk assessment been completed and does it include key considerations such as: • Duration of work, • Frequency of work, • Cumulative exposure, • Location of work including access to shaded areas, • Time of day, • UV level, • Reflected surfaces that can increase UV exposure e.g. water, metal, • Driving for work activities • Employees at greater risk e.g., those with medical conditions, personal history, medication, those who have undergone radiotherapy/chemotherapy, and skin tone which may increase their susceptibility to sun_related ill health.		
3.	Is your risk assessment documented and regularly reviewed and communicated to all relevant staff?		
4.	Do you conduct dynamic risk assessment training?		
5.	Do you conduct regular training and awareness programmes for sun safety?		
6.	Is health surveillance required? If so, is it conducted regularly?		
7.	Do employees report sun-safety related incidents?		
8.	Do you keep records of incident reports?		
9.	Do you monitor weather conditions throughout the working day?		

	Working in Adverse Weather – Sun Safety	Y/N	Comments
10.	Do you have safe working procedures that define when additional control measures are necessary and specify thresholds at which work may need to be suspended under extreme conditions?		
11.	Do you check that workers are following procedures and safe systems of work?		
12.	Do you have adapted work schedules around high UV periods e.g. job rotation? Earlier start times?		
13.	Do you provide sun-protective PPE?		
14.	Is sun-protective PPE compatible with other required safety equipment?		
15.	Do you have a defined minimum protection standard of sunscreen?		
16.	Have you considered the provision of sunscreen to employees or expenses policies for sunscreen purchase?		
17.	Do you provide shaded rest facilities for workers?		
18.	Do you provide access to clean, potable drinking water?		

19.	Additional comments:

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