

## SPOT THE SAFETY VIOLATION: Bare-Chested = Unprotected



These workers may have opted to go shirtless to stay cool but they're exposing themselves to what health hazard'



The summer poses various health hazards to workers who work outside, including the risk of heat stress and other heat-related illnesses and exposure to dangerous plants and insects, such as poison ivy and ticks. But being outside in the blazing sun can also expose them to the risk of developing skin cancer.

The construction workers in this picture are building a new pier. You can understand why they opted to remove their shirts'it likely makes them feel

cooler and may help them avoid heat-related illnesses.

But going shirtless exposes a lot of bare skin to the sun. In addition, the workers are working near water, which reflects the sun and thus increases their exposure to its UV rays. So even if the workers are wearing sunscreen—which they should be—they should also be wearing proper clothing, including shirts and hats.

## **Skin Cancer Basics**

The sun's UV radiation penetrates the skin and harms the DNA within the cells and other parts of the skin. In the short term, sun exposure can cause sunburns and suntans. Both are signs of skin damage. And repeated exposure over the years may result in sun-induced skin changes, such as wrinkles, mottling of skin colour and skin cancer.

So if your workers are outside for much of the workday, they're at risk of skin damage and even skin cancer from exposure to the sun. And if workers are outdoors between noon and 2:00 pm, that risk is heightened because the sun's UV radiation is at its strongest during those hours. Note that although the sun is strongest in the summer, outdoor workers are at risk year-round.

The good news is that when skin cancer is detected early, it's often completely curable. So dermatologists recommend that individuals regularly check their skin for new or changing spots.

When checking moles, freckles or other skin changes, tell your workers to remember the ABCDEs:

- **Asymmetry:** One half that doesn't match the other
- **Border:** Irregular or ragged edges
- **Colour:** A mix of shades or colors
- **Diameter:** A width of more than 6 millimeters, about the size of a pencil eraser
- **Evolving:** A change in the size, shape or color of a spot or the surrounding skin

Other things workers should look for include areas that:

- Are rough, scaly or lumpy
- Look red or swollen
- Ooze or bleed
- Feel itchy, tender or painful
- Grow back after having been removed.

## **How to Protect Workers from Skin Cancer**

If your workers are exposed to the sun and so at risk of developing skin cancer, take these steps to protect them:

- Implement a sun safety policy (adapt and use this model policy)
- Educate workers on the risks of sun exposure, such as by giving them this handout or hanging this poster in the workplace
- Give this quiz to all workers who work outside so they can determine their risk of developing skin cancer based on factors such as their colouring,

family history of skin cancer and whether they tan or burn.

Here are six tips from the Canadian Dermatology Association, which has many great resources on sun safety, that workers can follow to protect themselves:

1. Try to limit the amount of time you work outdoors in the sun from 11 am to 4 pm.
2. Seek shade from buildings, trees, canopies, etc., as much as possible, especially during breaks.
3. Wear a wide-brimmed hat (more than 8 cm or 3 inches). Attach a back flap to a hardhat to cover the back of the neck and a visor for the front of the face. (Three of the most common skin cancers are found on the face, head and neck.)
4. Wear clothing that covers as much of the body as possible. Fabrics that don't let light through work best. Make sure clothing is loose and comfortable. And if possible, choose clothing with built in SPF protection.
5. Apply an SPF 30 or higher, broad spectrum (which protects against UVA and UVB) sunscreen to *all* exposed areas of skin before you go outside. Also use a broad spectrum, SPF 30 lip balm.
6. Reapply sunscreen at midday or more often if you're perspiring heavily