

Spot The Safety Violation: Stay Covered in the Sun



Going shirtless may be cooler in the summer but it exposes workers to what health hazard'



During the summer, workers who work outside are not only at risk of heat stress and other heat-related illnesses but also skin cancer from exposure to the sun.

The construction workers in this picture appeared to have removed their shirts

because it's hot. But while going shirtless may make them feel cooler and help them avoid heat-related illnesses, it exposes a lot of bare skin to the sun. And even if they're wearing sunscreen, which they should be, proper clothing would be a better safety measure.

Skin Cancer 101

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. But 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. That risk is heightened because many outdoor workers are in the sun when its UV radiation is at its strongest: between 12 noon and 2 pm. And although the sun is strongest in the summer, workers are at risk year-round.

Protecting 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:

- Try to limit the amount of time you work outdoors in the sun from 11 am to 4 pm.
- Seek shade from buildings, trees, canopies, etc, as much as possible, especially during breaks.
- 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.)
- 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.
- 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. Apply a broad spectrum, SPF 30 lip balm.
- Reapply sunscreen at midday or more often if you're perspiring heavily.