

Key messages to support leaders in promoting the importance of sun safety in their workplace

This document has been prepared to support you as a sun safety leader in delivering key messages to management and staff to help highlight the importance of sun safety in your workplace.

How to use the messages:

- These messages can be used as part of delivering a presentation (e.g. presenting to management on why you need to take action), or even added to staff communications (such as newsletters, emails or on your intranet).
- You don't have to use all these messages, but simply choose those that resonate best with your workplace context or intended use (please do not edit the content of the messages).

Key messages

Research confirms that regular sun protection is more effective than skin checks

An Australian research study released in early 2020¹ confirms that the daily use of sunscreen is more effective in reducing new cases and deaths from skin cancers than annual skin checks undertaken by a medical professional.

While Cancer Council NSW acknowledges skin checks are important in supporting the early detection and effective treatment of skin cancer, workplaces should not rely on skin checks alone. Rather a variety of UV safety control measures are required, including the 5 prevention measures of 'long longs' (i.e. long sleeves and trousers), sunscreen, broad-brimmed hats, use of shade and sunglasses.

Sun safety control measures can help employers meet their WHS duty of care around UV radiation and heat

Employers have a duty of care to ensure all workers work safely and without risk to their health – this includes exposure to both UV radiation and heat. This duty of care applies not just to employees but extends to all other worker types such as subcontractors or volunteers

Yet Australian evidence indicates that workplaces can do better.

- 90% of outdoor workers are currently working without full sun protection.^{2,3}
- In NSW 25% of workplaces do not provide workers with any sun protection at all.⁴

There are simple and practical improvements that you can make to your workplace that will protect your employees. These include implementing controls like shade and rescheduling of outdoor tasks outside the middle of the day can help to reduce both heat stress and UV damage.

The evidence is clear: outdoor workers need to use sun protection every day

Australia is the skin cancer capital of the world, with 2 in 3 of us developing some form of skin cancer in our lifetime.

Outdoor workers are at even greater risk because they:

- are exposed to sun for extended periods of time throughout their working life
- receive between 5 to 10 times more UV radiation than people who work indoors
- have a higher than average risk of developing common skin cancers.

Almost all skin cancers are caused by UV radiation, making them highly preventable.

Cancer Council recommends that sun protection is required when the UV Index reaches 3 and above, which in NSW occurs for at least 10 months of the year.

When it comes to outdoor workers or those working near highly reflective surfaces, Cancer Council recommends that sun protection is used year-round, even when the UV Index is below 3. This is because UV damage accumulates over time, and increased exposure to UV increases future skin cancer risk

Leadership enables cultural change

When supervisors and managers are actively involved in safety, workers are more likely to support and follow safe work procedures and raise safety issues.

Make UV protection mandatory not optional

Evidence shows that employees experience less sun damage when sun safety is mandatory in their workplace. However, if given the choice employees will generally choose the easy or 'more acceptable' option (-such as caps over broad-brimmed hats). Research also shows that long-longs don't increase body temperature and provide the best UV protection. So, whenever you can, make UV protection mandatory not optional, and help create a UV safe culture in your workplace

No fault mandatory sun damage reporting contributes to sun safety

Good workplace safety culture assigns no fault or consequence for reporting WHS issues.

No fault mandatory reporting of sun damage in a workplace is important because many outdoor workers are unaware that sun damage (such as sunburn or skin cancer) is a reportable event.

Making reporting of sun damage mandatory, emphasises the seriousness of sun safety to workers, and that sun damage events need to be reported. Workers will be more likely to report in a 'no fault' environment where they can be sure they will suffer no consequences.

References

1. Gordon L, Olsen C, Whiteman DC, Elliott TM, Janda M, Green A. Prevention versus early detection for long-term control of melanoma and keratinocyte carcinomas: a cost-effectiveness modelling study. *BMJ Open*. 2020;10(2):e034388.
2. Carey RN, Glass DC, Peters S, Reid A, Benke G, Driscoll TR, et al. Occupational exposure to solar radiation in Australia: who is exposed and what protection do they use? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. 2014;38(1):54-9.
3. Cancer Institute NSW. Sun protection attitudes, intentions and behaviours of NSW males aged 40–65 years. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW; 2019. 47 p. Available from: <https://www.cancer.nsw.gov.au/getattachment/how-we-help/reports-and-publications/sun-protection-attitudes-intentions-and-behaviour/Sun-Protection-Behaviours-with-Men-Aged-40-65-Years-presentation.PDF?lang=en-AU>.
4. Cancer Council NSW. 2019 Cancer Prevention Community Survey. Unpublished report completed by the Social Research Centre, on behalf of Cancer Council NSW. 2019. p117.