

Safety Alert

Feeling hot? Exposure to UV radiation an emerging OHS issue

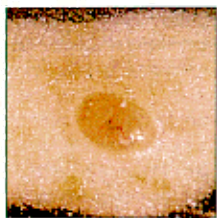
September 2006

With Australia having the highest rates of skin cancer in the world, it is important the employers adopt appropriate measures to comply with their obligation to eliminate or control risks to the health and safety of employee's and non-employees.

Whilst there have been no prosecutions of employers who fail to eliminate or control the risks to the employee's health and safety through exposure to UV radiation, employers remain legally obliged to eliminate or control such risks. The fact remains that two out of every three Australians who live to the age of 75 can expect to develop some type of skin cancer. Whilst a tan was once considered a sign of good health, it is in fact, a sign of exposure to too much UV radiation.

In the short term, exposure of untanned skin to the summer sun between 10.00am and 2.00pm will show mild sunburn within 12 minutes, discomfort within 30 minutes, peeling and blistering in 60 minutes and permanent damage after 120 minutes. Prolonged exposure to sunlight is well established as the major cause of skin cancer in Australia. The three main types of skin cancers in Australia are:

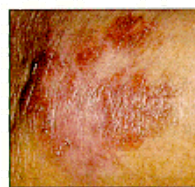
- Basal cell carcinoma - the most common, but least dangerous
- Squamous cell carcinoma - less common, but more dangerous than basal cell carcinoma
- Melanoma - least common, but most dangerous of all skin cancers.



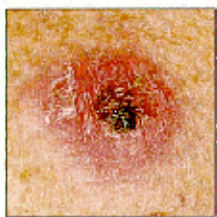
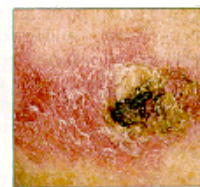
Small, smooth, shiny, pale, or waxy lump



Firm, red lump



A flat, red spot that is rough, dry or scaly



A lump that bleeds or develops crust

Photos courtesy of NCC's Dermatology Branch

LOOK FOR DANGER SIGNS IN PIGMENTED LESIONS OF THE SKIN

Consult your dermatologist immediately if any of your moles or pigmented spots exhibits:



A Asymmetry-one half unlike the other half.



B Border irregular- scalloped or poorly circumscribed border.



C Color varied from one area to another; shades of tan and brown; black; sometimes white, red or blue.



D Diameter larger than 6mm as a rule (diameter of pencil eraser).

Given that UV radiation levels are at their peak between 10am and 2pm (or 11am and 3pm daylight saving time), simple and practical measures that employers can take to reduce the exposure of this risk to their employee's health include:

- Re-organising employees' work schedules to avoid peak UV radiation times
- Starting earlier in the day, for example 7am or earlier in summer
- Undertaking tasks indoors when possible during peak UV radiation times
- Taking morning tea and lunch breaks indoors or in the shade
- Rotating indoor and outdoor workers, so that outside work is shared during peak UV radiation times

Tips for employees include:

- wearing protective clothing, sunglasses and sunscreen when working outdoors
- drinking 150-200mm of cool fluids every 15 to 20 minutes
- changing work times when possible, to avoid being outside in peak UV radiation time.
- whenever possible working in the shade when outdoors
- participating in sun protection training and education.

Tips for employers include:

It is also worth remembering that items of sun protection (sunscreen, sunglasses and hats) are tax deductible.

Employers should provide training where the need is identified in an exposure assessment. The training program should be included in the induction of new employees and should be targeted to people receiving prolonged exposure to solar UV radiation. Training and education should enhance recognition of the harmful effects of solar UV radiation, promote safe working procedures and provide information on self-screening for skin cancer.

Workplaces employing outdoor workers need to develop and implement a sun protection policy, which will be regularly reviewed. An employer with such measures in place will minimise their exposure to the possible charge that their systems of work failed to protect their employees from the risk of UV radiation.

For more information visit www.deacons.com.au, or contact:

Brisbane	Martin Osborne	martin.osborne@deacons.com.au	+61 (0) 7 3309 0230
Melbourne	Mike Hammond	michael.hammond@deacons.com.au	+61 (0) 3 8686 6293
Perth	Estelle Blewett	estelle.blewett@deacons.com.au	+61 (0) 8 9426 3203
Sydney	Jason Noakes	jason.noakes@deacons.com.au	+61 (0) 2 9330 8021
Sydney	Michael Tooma	michael.tooma@deacons.com.au	+61 (0) 2 9330 8108

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Authorised by Andrew Ferguson, State Secretary, CFMEU (Construction & General Division) NSW Branch
12 Railway Street, Lidcombe NSW 2141 Ph: (02) 9749 0400

Email: enquires@nsw.cfmeu.asn.au; Web: www.cfmeu-construction-nsw.com

Your Rights At Work website - <http://www.rightsatwork.com.au/>

Tune in to Workers Radio Sydney 88.9FM Weekdays 5:30am – 9:00am