Sun Safety

I'm here today to talk to you, as outdoor workers, about an occupational risk that you might not have thought much about: skin cancer.

While there is no strict definition, the term "outdoor worker" can include those individuals who work outdoors for 3 or more hours most days of the work week.

Outdoor workers like you have been identified by many public health organizations as a high-risk group for skin cancer due to the nature of your occupation and the high levels of UV exposure you face. It is estimated that outdoor workers are exposed to 8X the UV radiation of an indoor worker.

Because most of the dangerous effects of UV exposure occur years after the exposure, these risks have received little attention. Sun safety has historically not been a high priority in the workplace as UV exposure has typically not been viewed as a serious hazard. Fortunately, that is changing and that is why I am here today.

The reality is that the dangers of UV exposure are not immediately apparent. If someone falls and sustains an injury on your worksite, that is immediately obvious. But the dangers that occur after sun exposure can show up 5, 10, or even 20 years later in the form of skin cancer. The World Health Organization has declared that ultraviolet radiation in the sun's rays is a known human carcinogen, as dangerous as arsenic and nicotine.

Skin cancer is the **most commonly diagnosed cancer** in the US: it occurs more than all other types of cancers **combined**!

Skin cancer is also **the most PREVENTABLE** form of cancer in the US. Think about that. We can adopt sunsafe behaviors to reduce our risk of developing skin cancer.

Many Americans simply haven't incorporated sun protection into their daily health habits.

The good news is that the occupational exposure to UV radiation that you, as outdoor workers, have can be modified. That is the purpose of today's toolbox talk. So, today, let's talk about behaviors you can adopt to protect yourself from skin cancer.

The World Health Organization recommends that a combination of sun protective measures should be implemented once the UV index is above 3. (Check the UV index on your phone while giving this talk.)

So, outdoor workers should be using sun protection strategies even during chilly months. The temperature has little to do with the UV index. The day may be chilly and raw, but there is still a danger of UV exposure that outdoor workers may be completely unaware of. Start every day checking the UV index on your phone. A simple and easy step to be informed of the need to be safe outside while working.

How many of you check the UV index on a regular basis?
I know you are all familiar with Personal Protective Equipment…today we are going to talk about another category of PPE for skin cancer prevention. This includes sunscreen, wide brimmed hats, neck shields to protect that back of your neck, long sleeved shirts, sunglasses and gloves, as well as shade.

First, we'll talk about sunscreen.
People are usually terrific at applying sunscreen when they are on vacation or at the beach, but don't really think about the sun exposure they are getting on a daily basis while working.

Many people don't believe that they need sun protection in the workplace.

We need to bust this myth and recognize that day-to-day workplace sun exposure can be as dangerous as the sun you get lying on the beach.

Starting the day with a generous application of sunscreen and reapplying this at regular intervals through the day can go a long way at preventing sun damage. Regular use of sunscreen of SPF30 or higher reduces your risk of developing melanoma by 50%.

Wide brimmed hats and long sleeve shirts are also helpful for preventing exposure to the ears and the scalp and arms. Sunglasses are another essential component of sun protection. We know that outdoor workers are also at greater risk for developing cataracts and age-related macular degeneration from long term UVB exposure. These risks can be minimized by wearing UV protective eyewear regularly. Even clear glasses can be UV protective, all frames should have large lenses and a close wrap-around style. Wide stems offer additional protection from UV radiation coming from the side.

Any thoughts on expanding your PPE to be sunsafe?

We have partnered with IMPACT Melanoma to encourage you to take on these sun safety precautions as part of your overall workplace safety habits. By adopting these strategies, you can not only protect yourself from deadly skin cancers, but you can serve as a role model for your families, co-workers, and visitors to your workplace. So, join us in implementing these sunsafe workplace practices.

What is one takeaway from today's toolbox talk?

Has anyone had a personal experience of being diagnosed with skin cancer that they want to share?

TOGETHER, we can make a huge IMPACT on reducing our risk of developing skin cancer including its most serious form, melanoma.

The life you save may very well be your own.

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