



# Protecting outdoor workers from the sun and **skin cancer**



## Employer's toolkit



## Foreword

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HSE acknowledges Liverpool City Council's '**sun campaign**'. The toolkit has been developed with the support of business, which includes a major UK construction company and a specialist provider of ground/countryside management.



HSE recognises that this toolkit contains some advice that may go further than the minimum needed to comply with health and safety law, however we welcome this contribution towards **preventing skin cancers in outdoor workers**.

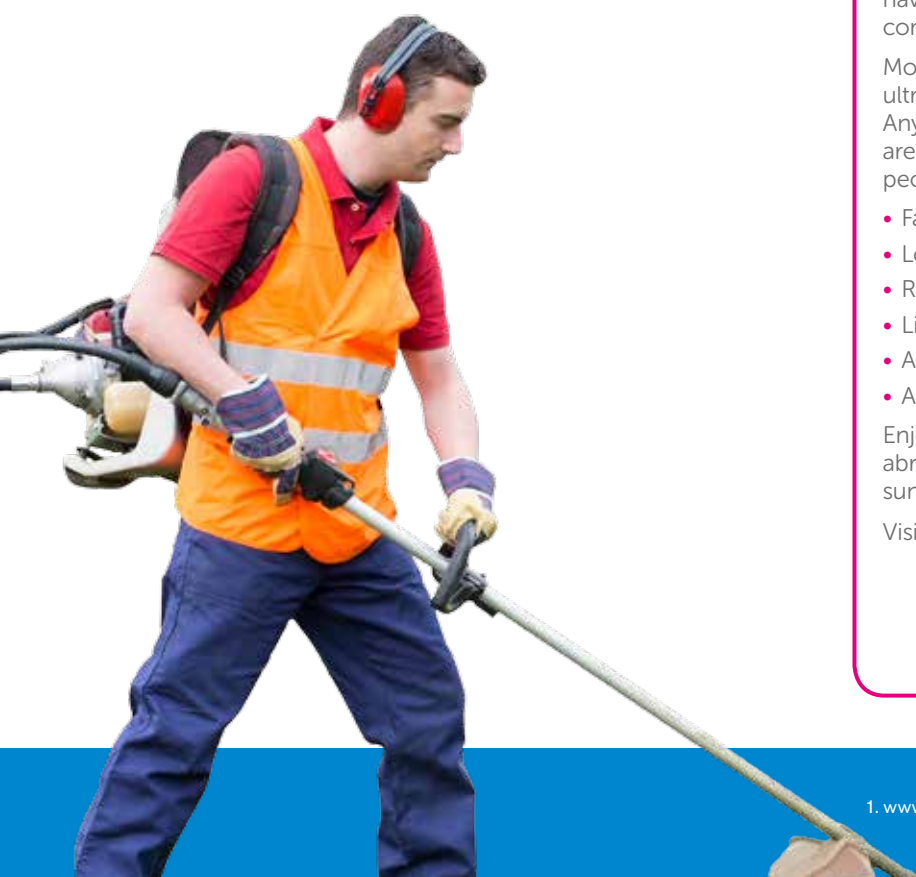
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As an employer of outdoor workers, you are in a position to help educate outdoor workers to protect themselves in the sun from the damage caused by Ultra Violet (UV) rays, and to educate them about the importance of visiting their doctor if they notice any changes in their moles or to their skin.

Research shows that outdoor workers are receptive to receiving this type of information in their workplace.

This toolkit provides you with the support needed to share the messages that outdoor workers are most receptive to and which will have the most impact to encourage them to take action. The toolkit has been built on extensive insight with outdoor workers, which was undertaken by Public Health Liverpool.



## Skin cancer facts

- Skin cancer kills more men than women.
- Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the UK, with over 100,000 non melanoma skin cancer cases and over 12,800 malignant melanoma cases diagnosed each year.<sup>1</sup>
- Spending more time in the sun increases the risk of developing skin cancer.
- Outdoor workers are twice as likely to get skin cancer as people working indoors.
- The most important way to prevent skin cancer is to encourage your employees to protect their skin from the harmful effects of the sun's rays, using shade, clothing and at least factor 15 sunscreen to protect skin from UV rays when the sun is strong.

## Why early diagnosis is important?

It can take 10 – 30 years for skin cancer to appear, so if people who haven't always protected themselves from the sun they could still be at risk.

Finding skin cancer early can save lives. It is important to report unusual changes to moles or skin to the doctor.

Information below provided by Cancer Research UK.

### WHO IS MOST AT RISK OF SKIN CANCER?

Over the last thirty years, rates of malignant melanoma (the most deadly form of skin cancer) have risen faster than any of the current ten most common cancers.

Most skin cancers are caused by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or sunbeds. Anyone can develop skin cancer, but some people are more likely to get the disease than others. These people tend to have one or more of the following:

- Fair skin that burns easily in strong sun
- Lots of moles or freckles
- Red or fair hair
- Light-coloured eyes
- A personal or family history of skin cancer
- A history of sunburn

Enjoy the sun safely. Whether you're at home or abroad, use shade, clothing and at least SPF15 sunscreen to protect yourself.

Visit [sunsmart.org.uk](https://www.sunsmart.org.uk) for further information.



## Protecting employees from the sun and skin cancer

Developing and implementing an effective sun protection programme for workers is not difficult. A range of simple protective measures can help reduce the risk of sun related injuries and reduce the cost (human and economic) associated with skin cancer. There are also potential benefits in terms of a reduction in the number of sick days, as well as increased productivity and the associated financial returns.

### Why is sun protection essential for outdoor workers?

Outdoor workers have a much higher risk of developing skin cancer because they are regularly exposed to the sun for prolonged periods of time, especially during the spring and summer months when ultraviolet radiation levels are high. They will often work throughout the day when UV rays are at their highest.

People who work outdoors generally receive 3-4 times more UV exposure from the sun than those working indoors. As a result, they are twice as likely to be diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer as indoor workers.<sup>2</sup>

However, research shows the majority of outdoor workers aren't aware that their job has a direct effect on the risk of them developing skin cancer.

Whilst employers can't control how much sun exposure outdoor workers receive when they are outside of their workplace, they are in a position to raise awareness of the importance of sun protection and show workers how to protect themselves from the sun, which can influence workers behaviours both inside and outside of work.

## The importance of early diagnosis

A large proportion of outdoor workers are male. The rate of men dying from malignant melanoma – the deadliest form of skin cancer – has doubled in the last 30 years according to Cancer Research UK figures, published May 2010. Over the last decade incidence rates for Malignant Melanoma in males has increased by 65%.<sup>3</sup>

By the time malignant melanoma is diagnosed, around 24% of male cases are terminal as opposed to 15% of female cases (2005 incidence compared to 2006 mortality)<sup>5</sup>. This is because women tend to check themselves for symptoms more frequently and present at GPs earlier than males. The typical locations of malignant melanoma in men also contribute, with men more likely to develop the disease on the back. For this reason, even men who check themselves often miss the warning signs.

Whilst the introduction of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has reduced the amount that outdoor workers are exposed to the sun, it can take 10 – 30 years for skin cancer to appear. So even if workers protect themselves from the sun right now, if they haven't always done so, they could still be at risk of skin cancer.

## Protecting your workforce

There are a number of things which employers can do to protect workers from the sun and skin cancer:

- Risk assessments.
- Control measures such as providing shade, or rotating staff to reduce the amount of time each worker spends in the sun during peak periods.
- Provide appropriate protective clothing which should include long sleeved tops, hats with a protective brim, and which could include protection for the neck and ears. Involving the workforce in decisions about the particular types of clothing provided may improve the number of those wearing it.
- Raising awareness of sun protection, skin cancer symptoms and the importance of early diagnosis through employee training and internal communications.
- You could consider providing sunscreen to protect those most at risk; remember to involve the workforce in decisions about the particular sunscreen provided, although there is no legal requirement for you to do so.
- Work in partnership with unions to share messages.





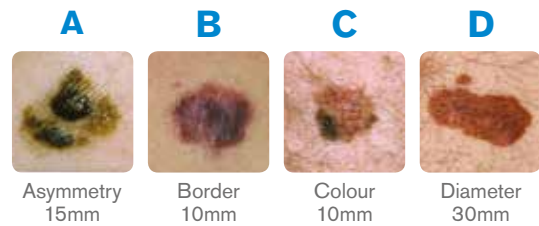
## Key messages for employee education and communications

It is recommended that the following messages, which resonate with workers, are built in to employee training and regularly reinforced through internal communications such as toolbox talks etc.

### Sun Protection

- The best way to protect yourself from the sun is to **cover up and use sunscreen** with at least a SPF of 15 however you will gain a greater protection from UV rays if the SPF factor is higher.
- Make sure to **protect your ears, neck and lips** which are often left uncovered and are high-risk areas for skin cancer.
- Sunburn does not have to be raw, peeling or blistering, if your skin has gone red in the sun, it is sunburnt. **Sunburn is a sign that the DNA in your skin cells has been damaged** by too much UV radiation. Repeated damage can increase your risk of skin cancer.
- **You are not protected from skin cancer** just because your skin is tanned / weathered and used to being in the sun.
- **There is no such thing as a healthy tan.** A tan is the skin's response to the sun's damaging rays and is therefore an indicator of sun damage.
- If you have a reaction to sunscreen **consider switching to an alternative brand.**
- During the UK summer, the **sun's UV rays are usually strongest between 11am and 3pm.** It's important to be especially careful about protecting your skin from sunburn during these hours.
- Clouds may give a false sense of security - **UV radiation from sunshine still penetrates thin cloud.**
- Try to **sit in the shade** during break times.

The **ABCD** (**A**symmetry, **B**order, **C**olour, **D**iameter) rule can help you remember some key changes to look out for.



### Early Diagnosis

There is low awareness of the symptoms of skin cancer and of the importance of early diagnosis amongst outdoor workers. The early diagnosis and treatment of skin cancer relies heavily on early detection, with an emphasis on self-examination.

Key early detection messages for employees:

- Outdoor workers are at greater risk of skin cancer.
- It can take 10-30 years for skin cancer to appear, so it is important to check your skin regularly for changes.
- Finding skin cancer early makes it more treatable and could save your life.
- If you have moles, check them for change in size (has the mole got larger?), shape (has the border of the mole become irregular?), colour (has the colour changed?).
- Does the mole itch or bleed?
- Any change in a mole, freckle or normal patch of skin that occurs quickly, over weeks or months, should be taken seriously and reported to your doctor as soon as possible.



## Protection from the sun

### Protective Clothing

Employees should be provided with protective clothing if working outdoors. The overall protection provided by clothing depends both on the material from which it is made and the garments design.

Ideally sun protection clothing for workers should consist of long sleeve shirts with a collar and long trousers. Where this level of protection is not reasonably practicable, shirts with sleeves at least to the elbow and shorts at least to the knee would be a suitable alternative.

Darker colours should be used as they absorb more of the UV rays than lighter colours of the same fabric. Essentially though, clothes should have densely woven fabric as this increases the levels of UV protection.



### Sun protective hats

A sun protective hat is one that shades the face, head, ears and neck. On sites where hard hats are mandatory, additional protection should be considered to protect face, ears and neck.



Various sun protection accessories are available, such as detachable brims and neck flaps for hard hats and helmets.

Research has shown that if organisations involve workers in decisions about the type of sun protection they provide, they are more likely to use it.

### Sunscreen

Sunscreen should always be used alongside other protective measures.

Sunscreens should have an SPF rating of at least 15 (a higher SPF factor gives better protection) and should be water-resistant for maximum protection.

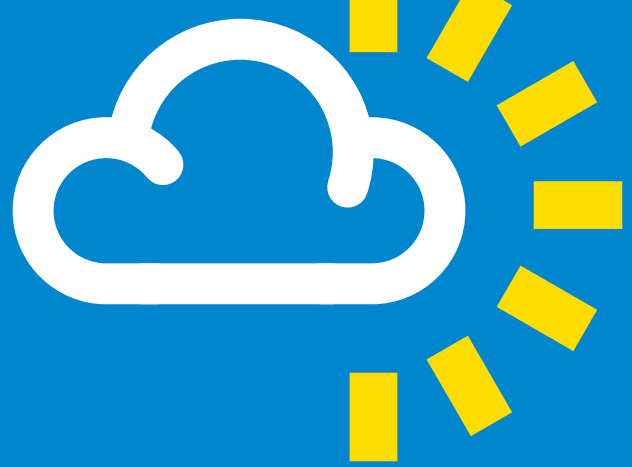
Research shows that outdoor workers tend to use sunscreen at the beginning of the summer, feeling that they don't need to use it once their skin has acclimatised to the sun. Employers can encourage greater use of sunscreen by encouraging workers to use it throughout the peak periods of May – September and reminding them that having a tan does not protect them from the risk of skin cancer.

Although non-melanoma skin cancer is extremely common, in the vast majority of cases it is detected early and is not life-threatening.

Malignant melanoma survival has been improving for the last twenty-five years and is now amongst the highest for any cancer.<sup>5</sup>

## Campaign material

The following campaign materials have been developed to increase awareness of sun protection and early diagnosis for outdoor workers. These materials should be placed in areas of high footfall to serve as a constant reminder to employees.



### Sun protection poster

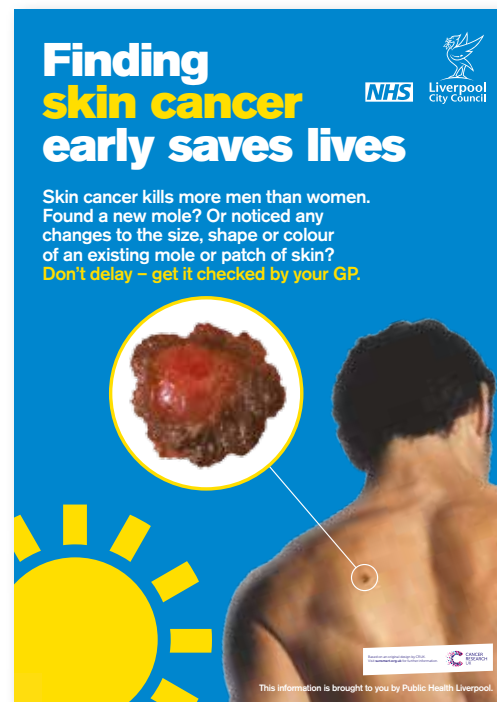
This sun protection poster clearly highlights the areas where skin cancer is most commonly found.

The poster shows that workers are at risk of sun damage even when it is cloudy.



### Early diagnosis poster

Insight has shown that the early diagnosis poster has a strong impact on outdoor workers in highlighting the key message that 'finding skin cancer early saves lives'.



### Symptoms card

This card should be distributed to employees who work outdoors.

It is important to regularly check your skin for signs of sun damage and skin cancer. Employees should be encouraged to share the information on the card with their families, and to check their skin regularly.

