

Working in the Sun and Heat

Sunburn and exposure to the UV in sunlight can significantly increase an individual's risk of skin cancer. Those most at risk are people with fair skin, lots of freckles or moles, or a family history of skin cancer. Direct sunlight exposure is not necessary to increase the risk; even exposure to UV light on bright overcast days can increase the risk.

Hazards of working in hot weather

- Sunburn: very common; painful with skin blisters and peeling
- increased risk of sun cancer by exposure to UV light whether or not sunburn occurs
- prickly heat: groups of small itchy spots on the skin
- heat exhaustion: fainting, cramp and nausea
- heat stress.

What is 'heat stress'?

Heat stress occurs when the body's means of controlling its internal temperature starts to fail. As well as air temperature, factors such as work rate, humidity and clothing worn while working may lead to heat stress.

Typical symptoms are:

- an inability to concentrate
- muscle cramps
- heat rash
- severe thirst
- fainting
- heat exhaustion - fatigue, giddiness, nausea, headache, moist skin
- heat stroke - hot dry skin, confusion, convulsions and eventual loss of consciousness.

This is a severe disorder and can result in death if not detected at an early stage.

A risk assessment must be carried out where there is a possibility of heat stress occurring in the workplace.

Hot weather driving

It is easy to lose concentration, especially over a long period. Ensure drivers:

- carry water and drinks
- stop periodically
- carry a first aid kit and moist wipes
- are provided with a mobile telephone.

Risk assessment

Factors to consider are:

- those working out of doors for long periods particularly with exposed skin
- work rate - the harder someone works the greater the amount of body heat generated
- working climate - this includes air temperature, humidity, air movement
- worker clothing and respiratory protective equipment - may impair the efficiency of sweating and other means of temperature regulation
- worker's age, build and medical factors - may affect an individual's tolerance.

Did you know?

- Over exposure to UV radiation is the major environmental cause of all types of skin cancer.
- There are around 16,200 new melanoma skin cancer cases in the UK every year.

“Consider work rate, working climate, clothing and worker's age”



Working in the Sun and Heat

Reducing the risks:

- identify employees who are at risk due to sunlight exposure or exposure to heat
- control the temperature using fans or air conditioning
- provide mechanical aids where possible to reduce the work rate
- limit exposure to cooler times of the day
- prevent dehydration
- provide personal protective equipment
- provide training
- monitor the health of workers at risk
- provide sunglasses to protect workers from the hazard of UV radiation. This is especially important for those working around water or on snow
- sunglasses provided for workers should meet BS EN ISO 12311 and BS EN ISO 12312-1.

Recommendations for employers:

- introduce controls and precautions for those who may be working in high temperatures or exposed to heat stress due to a combination of temperature, humidity and radiant heat
- make provisions for workers to avoid sun exposure between 11am and 3pm when UV radiation is at its peak, even if it is overcast
- reserve indoor or sheltered jobs for peak UV radiation times
- rotate staff to limit each employee's midday sun exposure where possible
- provide shade (eg awnings, canopies) for workers to use, especially during breaks. If this is not feasible, encourage workers to find shade under trees, buildings and other temporary shelter
- encourage workers to cover up
- provide hats or appropriate headgear for workers to wear. Hats should ideally shade the face, neck, ears and head
- provide cool water in the workplace and encourage workers to drink it frequently in small amounts before, during and after work
- provide at least SPF 15+ sunscreen for outdoor workers to use where necessary.

Legal duties

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974: the employer has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of all employees, which extends to dealing with weather conditions to which the employee is exposed whilst at work.

Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (as amended): employers should select, provide and maintain suitable PPE and ensure employees are trained in its use. This includes PPE to control exposure to working in sun and heat.

Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015: the temperature inside the workplace must be 'reasonable' and rest areas and dry clothing should be provided.

Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 requires the temperature in a workplace to be reasonable.

Management of Health and Work Regulations 1999: employers should conduct a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and this includes the dangers from the thermal environment and natural UV radiation to which employees are exposed at work.