

CITY AND COUNTY OF CARDIFF

CODE OF GUIDANCE

WORKING IN THE SUN

PURPOSE

This Code of Guidance is produced for the guidance of Council employees who are required to work outdoors, especially during summer months.

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1.0 Introduction

A sunny day makes most people feel good, but too much sunlight may harm your skin. The ultraviolet (UV) radiation in sunlight causes the problem.

People who are required to work outdoors for long periods could get more sun on their skin than is healthy and should be aware of the risks. A tan (which is a pigment called melanin) is the body's way of protected itself against the suns ultraviolet rays and is a sign of skin damage.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer, but is also one of the most preventable.

According to the Office for National Statistics there are at present in the United Kingdom around 40,000 cases of skin cancer reported nationally each year and over 1,800 fatalities. These figures represent an increase of 100% over a period of the last 25 years.

There are three main types of skin cancer which are:

- Basal Cell Carcinoma – the most common type which usually does not spread and can be readily cured. Normally slow growing.
- Squamous Cell Carcinoma – second most common form which may spread to other parts of the body. Usually slow growing.
- Malignant Melanoma – is the least common but most serious as it spreads to other parts of the body fairly quickly. Early treatment of melanoma usually gives good results.

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Moles are normally harmless accumulations of pigment cells in the skin which can sometimes become melanomas.

The level of ultraviolet radiation can vary according to:

- The time of day – the sun's rays are most intense in the hours from 11.00 am to 3.00 pm.
- The time of year – the sun is at its strongest in the United Kingdom between April and September.
- Reflection – Water, sand and snow can reflect sunlight and increase the amount of exposure to ultraviolet radiation.
- Weather – The sun's ultraviolet rays are strongest under cloudless skies even when the temperature is low. Cloudy skies can only block around 20% of the sun's ultraviolet radiation.

2.0 What are the Dangers?

In the short term – Sunburn is the result of over exposure to the sun's ultraviolet radiation. It can blister your skin and make it peel. Even mild reddening is a sign of skin damage.

In the long term – The most serious effect of too much exposure to ultraviolet radiation in the long term is that it increases the likelihood of the development of skin cancer later in life. Exposure to too much sun will speed up the ageing of your skin making it leathery, mottled and wrinkled.

Abnormal reactions – It is possible that some medicines or contact with certain chemicals (such as wood preservative or coal tar/pitch products) or contact with some plants can make your skin more sensitive to the effects of sunlight. If you have any concerns you should contact your own doctor.

3.0 Who is at Risk?

People with white skin are most at risk, especially if you have:

- Fair or freckled skin that doesn't tan, or burns before it tans
- Red or fair hair and light coloured eyes
- A large number of moles – over 100 in young people or over 50 in older people.

People of Asian or Afro Caribbean origin have a high tolerance to ultraviolet radiation and are at almost no risk from skin cancer from sunshine.

4.0 How Can you be Protected?

Even if your skin is not fair or freckled you should still be particularly careful while you are working in the outdoors during the summer months, especially around midday.

Don't get burned;

- Get to know your skins most vulnerable areas and how they react to sunlight. This will help you decide what precautions to take.
- Try to avoid the reddening of the skin which is the first sign of burning.
- Try to take lunch breaks in the shade, this will reduce the risk of harming your skin.
- A suntan may give you some protection against burning but it does not eliminate the long term risk of skin cancer associated with prolonged exposure to the sun nor will it protect against premature ageing.
- Take care not to get burned as your skin remembers every exposure.

Clothing

- Cover up. Ordinary clothing made from close woven fabric, such as long sleeved workshirt and jeans, will stop most of the UV;
- Wear a hat. A wide brimmed hat will shade your face and head, the areas which suffer most from sunlight. A safety helmet will provide some shade for your head. A hanging flap can protect the back of your neck if you work leaning forward;
- Keep your shirt, or other top, on, especially while you are working around the middle of the day. Don't be tempted to leave it off – skin that hasn't seen the sun for months burns easily;
- The use of sunglasses will help to protect your eyes. Make sure that sunglasses are to British Standard BS2724.

Sunscreens

- Hats and other clothing are the best form of protection, but sunscreen creams and lotions can add useful protection for parts of your body that are not easy to shade from the sun. Look for a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of 15 or more; Read the supplier's instructions on how it should be applied and the timings for re-application over periods of time. Don't forget the backs of your hands. It is recommended that the sunscreen used is not old or out of date as the sun protection factor of old products will have deteriorated.

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5.0 Check your Skin

- You should check your skin regularly, especially areas that are normally exposed to the sun (face, neck, scalp, ears, hands and shoulders). The first warning sign of skin cancer is often a small sore or spot that does not heal within 6-8 weeks.
- You should check any moles you have regularly and look out for newly formed moles. The changes to look out for are:
 - ❑ A change in colour – especially darkening
 - ❑ A change in size – becoming larger
 - ❑ A change in shape – developing an irregular outline
 - ❑ A change in sensation – being itching or tingling
 - ❑ Bleeding – for no apparent reason
- If you notice any of these signs with your skin or moles you should consult your own doctor. Show him/her this guidance note and explain your work.
- Fortunately most of these signs will be harmless, but medical checks may be needed to be certain. Even if a spot or mole becomes cancerous, simple modern treatments are usually effective especially if it is spotted early. Don't delay if you think something might be wrong see your doctor.

Further Information:

Health and Safety Executive Guidance Leaflet : 'Keep Your Top On'
ISBN 0717615782

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