

Summertime Means Heightened Workplace Safety Concerns

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As we head into the summer months, those employers who regularly employ outdoor workers need to consider the safety risks associated with these positions. Outdoor workers run a greater risk of developing skin cancer or other sun-exposure related diseases than the average person because of the potential overexposure of sun from being outside the majority of each day.

So what should employers do to avoid the summertime blues? Although the likelihood of an OSHA visit due to sun exposure is minimal, more significant are the costs associated with illness, treatment, and absence due to skin cancers. For a little time and money, an employer can invest in helping its employees to live healthier lives, which leads to better productivity and higher morale in the workplace. Many employers have instituted wellness programs based on this philosophy. A general sun protection program is an essential part of any comprehensive wellness program. Here are some recommendations for minimizing outdoor employees' overexposure to the sun:

- While removing the job from the sun would be ideal, it's probably impractical in most cases. Employers may want to consider (1) scheduling shifts to avoid the high sun times between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. (2) rotating employees out of non-shaded areas frequently to minimize each employee's total length of exposure or (3) at least providing shaded areas for breaks.
- Employers should require employees to use PPE that will protect them from the sun's ultraviolet rays. The National Cancer Institute recommends the use of protective eyewear and clothing such as wide-brim hats, hat extensions, and long sleeves. Employees should use sun block (at least SPF 15) all over the body, including the lips. Training employees to properly use these types of PPE can be as important as requiring their use to make them effective.
- Educate outdoor workers about overall skin cancer prevention and identification, the importance of self-checks and the importance of regular visits with a dermatologist. Skin cancers that are caught and treated early are associated with a greater chance of overall survival and less cost.

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