

SAFETY FACTS: WORKING OUTDOORS

Sun

Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and skin cancer. There are no safe UV rays or safe suntans. Be especially careful in the sun if you burn easily, spend a lot of time outdoors, or have any of the following physical features: numerous, irregular, or large moles; freckles; fair skin; or blond, red, or light brown hair. Here's how to block those harmful rays:

- **Cover up.** Wear tightly woven clothing that you can't see through.
- **Use sunscreen.** A sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 blocks 93 percent of UV rays. Be sure to follow application directions on the bottle or tube.
- **Wear a hat.** A wide brim hat, not a baseball cap, works best because it protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.
- **Wear UV-absorbent shades.** Sunglasses don't have to be expensive, but they should block 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB radiation. Before you buy, read the product tag or label.
- **Limit exposure.** UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Helpful link:

www.cdc.gov/chooseyourcover

Heat

- Drink plenty of water before you get thirsty.
- Wear light; loose-fitting, breathable clothing-cotton is good.
- Take frequent short breaks in cool shade.
- Eat smaller meals before work activity.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol or large amounts of sugar.
- Find out from your health-care provider if your medications and heat don't mix.
- Know that equipment such as respirators or work suits can increase heat stress.

Helpful link:

www.cdc.gov/elcosh

Lyme Disease

This illness is caused by bites from infected ticks. Most, but not all, victims will develop a "bulls-eye" rash. Other signs and symptoms may be non-specific and similar to flu symptoms such as fever, lymph node swelling, neck stiffness, generalized fatigue, headaches, migrating joint aches, or muscle aches. You are at increased risk if your work involves construction, landscaping, forestry, brush clearing, land surveying, farming, railroads, oil fields, utility lines, or park and wildlife management. Protect yourself with these precautions:

- Wear light-colored clothes to see ticks more easily.
- Wear long sleeves; tuck pant legs into socks or boots.

- Wear high boots or closed shoes that cover your feet completely.
- Wear a hat.
- Use tick repellants, but not on your face.
- Shower after work. Wash and dry your work clothes at high temperature.
- Examine your body for ticks after work. Remove any attached ticks promptly with line-tipped tweezers. Do not use petroleum jelly, a hot match, or nail polish to remove the tick.

Helpful link:

www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_LymeFacts/lymefac.pdf

West Nile Virus

Illness from the West Nile virus is rare, but it does happen. Mild symptoms include fever, headache, and body aches, occasionally with a skin rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. Symptoms of severe infection include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. Getting rid of standing water in containers such as discarded tires, buckets, and barrels helps reduce mosquito-breeding areas. In addition, you can protect yourself from mosquito bites in these ways:

- Apply insect repellent with DEET to exposed skin.
- Spray clothing with repellents containing DEET or permethrin.
- Wear long sleeves, long pants, and socks.
- Be extra vigilant at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.

Helpful link:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm

Warm Weather Precautions

We expect this summer to be exceptionally hot, and employers and workers need to take precautions to protect against heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and other heat-related injuries and illnesses. Hot summer months are particularly hazardous for groundskeepers, construction workers and landscapers. WCR provides these tips to help protect workers from heat and sun injuries and illnesses:

Ensure employees are acclimated to hot weather. It usually takes a few weeks to prepare for warmer temperatures. Before working in the sun, spend some time, a few hours per day, building tolerance to the heat.

Learn the signs of heat-related illnesses. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include clammy feelings and profuse sweating. Place an overheated worker in the shade or a cool room. Loosen clothing, and apply a cool wet cloth to the face or back of the neck. Vomiting suggests medical attention is needed. Symptoms of heat stroke include skin that feels dry rather than sweaty, and the person may feel dizzy. Medical attention is recommended.

Schedule strenuous work during cooler hours of the day. UV rays are most intense between 10am and 4pm. Avoid labor intensive activities in direct sunlight during this time. If possible, work in shaded or partly shaded areas. Try the shadow test. If your shadow is shorter than you are, then the sun's rays are at their strongest.

Use the buddy system. Encourage your partner to drink plenty of cool water or other cool decaffeinated liquids. Be on the lookout for symptoms or signs of heat-related illnesses.

Encourage workers to wear proper clothing. Loose-fitting clothing, and natural fibers such as cotton, are best. Light color, long-sleeved shirts can protect the skin from the sun by reflecting rather than absorbing heat. Yet fabric must be tightly woven. To check, place your hand between a single layer of the material and a light source. If you can see your hand, the article offers little protection against UV rays.

Stress the importance of water. Drink lots of cool water when working in the sun. Workers should replenish fluids every 15-20 minutes. Avoid eating large meals, as well as drinking alcohol or caffeinated beverages. These make the body lose water, and increase the chance of dehydration.

Use sunscreen. A sun protection factor of at least 15 should be applied 15-20 minutes before beginning work. Employees should also consider wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses for added protection.

“Use Safety Precautions for Employees Working in Warm Weather.” *Workers’ Compensation Report*. June 6, 2006. Volume 17, No. 13, p. 259.