



Safety Scene

Here Comes the Sun

Take sun exposure seriously;
learn the best protection
techniques!



Tinted safety glasses can help you protect your eyes from all of the standard hazards in a component manufacturing plant as well as the damage associated with prolonged sun exposure.

at a glance

- ☐ Cataracts are the most common eye disorder associated with excessive sun exposure.
- ☐ Sun over-exposure and damage accumulates over time.
- ☐ If possible, limit employees' sun exposure at your facility.
- ☐ Use safe sun practices to keep you and your employees on the right track for preventing sun-related health risks.

by Molly E. Butz

Summer is upon us; the temperatures are rising, the foliage is greening and the sweet scent of a backyard barbecue lingers in the air. Summer also means more time spent in the sun, whether it's for work or play. However, no matter how good the warm rays feel or a new suntan looks, excessive sun exposure can lead to several dangerous health concerns including sunburn, eye damage and skin cancer. The good news? Many of these sun-related health risks can be greatly reduced or even prevented by following safe sun practices.

Working outdoors for at least part of the day is a necessity at many component manufacturing facilities. Whether the majority of the production is done outdoors or employees are only outdoors for specific tasks, like stacking/storing or retrieving materials, sun safety is an easy topic to add to your standard health and safety training.

Sun Risks

Finding the best methods for prevention means it's important to thoroughly understand the risks associated with ultraviolet (UV) radiation (sun) exposure. The first, and often most obvious, indication of over-exposure to UV rays is sunburn. Sunburn is recognized as pink or reddish skin that is hot to the touch and can be accompanied by general fatigue and mild dizziness. In severe cases, sunburn can blister and may require professional medical care.

Not surprisingly, sunlight can also damage the eyes. You may not know that cataracts, which cause cloudy vision, are the most common eye disorder associated with excessive sun exposure. In addition, UV rays can burn the surface of the eye causing a condition called photokeratitis. The symptoms of photokeratitis (tearing, pain, redness, swollen eyelids, headache and temporary loss of vision) are usually not long-term but can last for a couple of days.

Finally on the list is skin cancer, which accounts for nearly half of all cancers in the United States. As a matter of fact, according to the American Cancer Society, skin cancer is the most common of all cancers and in most cases is caused by sun exposure (www.cancer.org, Skin Cancer Facts). Skin cancer is broken into two major categories: nonmelanoma (basal or squamous cell) and melanoma. Basal and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common kinds of skin cancer and are readily curable when detected and treated early. Melanoma accounts for a much smaller percentage of skin cancer cases each year but is considered far more dangerous. Unlike basal or squamous cell cancer, melanoma is more likely to spread to other areas of the body and cause additional health concerns including

Sun Protection Factor (SPF)

(Source: www.medterms.com)

The SPF, or Sun Protection Factor, of your favorite sunscreen refers to the product's ability to block the sun rays that will burn your skin. SPF ratings can range from two to 60 and are calculated by comparing the amount of time needed to produce sunburn on protected skin to the amount of time needed to cause sunburn on unprotected skin.

Here's an example: If your skin would normally turn red in ten minutes in the sun, then ten minutes is considered your "initial burning time." If you use a sunscreen with SPF 2, your burning time increases to 20 minutes. If, instead of SPF 2, you increase to SPF 15, your burning time increases to 150 minutes (2 ½ hours), and so on. The initial burning time is multiplied by the SPF to equal the new burning time in minutes.

death. However, melanoma can also be cured if identified and treated early.

Beyond these serious health risks, it's also good to keep in mind that overexposure can cause other less severe skin concerns including wrinkles, liver spots, discoloration and precancerous lesions. Much of this damage is superficial, but over exposure and damage adds up over time and can lead to any of the serious health risks later in life.

Prevention

Safe sun practices will keep you and your employees on the right track for preventing sun-related health risks. As you might expect, the very best sun safe practice is to limit sun exposure whenever possible. Sometimes simply altering your work practices can help minimize sun exposure (see sidebar below for some ideas). And don't forget one critical factor: cloudy days don't always mean the sun is safe. Check your local UV index, a scale that estimates the intensity of the sun, to prepare each day's sun protection plan. (See **Support Docs** at www.sbcmag.info for a UV Index poster to post in your plant.)

If limiting sun exposure isn't an option at your facility, your next line of defense includes a number of mix and match safe sun practices. Begin by covering as much of your exposed skin as possible. Long pants and long sleeves made from tightly woven, lightweight, light colored cloth offer the best protection. A brimmed hat will keep your face, ears and neck shaded and adding sunglasses will help protect your eyes.

When completely covering your skin isn't feasible or reasonable, apply sunscreen, and choose a product with a minimum of 15 SPF (see sidebar on facing page for information about SPF). And remember, if you're sweating, reapply at least every two hours. It's important to note that some over-the-counter and prescription medications can cause you to be more sensitive to the sun. Be sure to check with your doctor if you take any medications and are exposed to the sun frequently.

Sunshine is an essential part of life so respecting its potentially harmful effects is critical in keeping you and your employees healthy. Encourage your employees to follow all sun safe practices at work and at home. Safety first! **SBC**

UV Index The Ultraviolet Index (UV Index) is a scale that estimates the intensity of the sun (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). The UV Index Scale provides a description of the danger associated with each level on the index, the color it will appear when it's shown on your local news/weather station and the recommended sun safe practices you'll need to stay protected. Go to **Support Docs** at www.sbcmag.info to download a poster. Please note that:

- The intensity of UV radiation reaching the surface of the earth varies greatly depending on how high the angle of the sun is in the sky. The sun reaches its highest angle at solar noon, which rarely corresponds to 12 on clocks. This is because of the differences between solar time and local time in a given time zone.
- The UV Index recommendations given are for adults with dark to moderately fair skin. Particularly fair-skinned people (and children) or those who have sun sensitivity for medical reasons need to take extra precautions.

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Sun Exposure Tips

In a component manufacturing facility, certain jobs will almost certainly require you or your employees to work in the sun. In these cases, altering work practices are not an option and other sun safe practices will need to be implemented for thorough protection. However, when applicable, these simple suggestions can greatly reduce your sun exposure.

- When possible, work in the shade. If your tasks don't absolutely require you to work in the sun, move your work station into a shaded area.
- If no natural shade is around, use umbrellas and tarps to quickly and inexpensively create temporary shade.
- Take breaks in the shade.
- If specific tasks require employees to be outdoors for extended period of time, schedule these tasks early in the morning or late in the afternoon when the UV levels are lower.
- Rotate employees to ensure the same people are not out in the sun every day.



Rotate the employees that take care of tasks, such as stacking trusses using outdoor racks, to limit sun exposure.

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