

Shade Guidelines for Outdoor Workers

sun & uv awareness

A work environment that adopts safe-sun practices can have a positive effect on the health of employees by reducing their risks for skin cancer.

In addition to providing, and insisting on the use of, uniforms, hats, sunglasses and sunscreen for outdoor workers, employers should consider adding artificial or natural shade to the work environment to help prevent exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun. Artificial shade could come in the form of canopies, umbrellas, gazebos, or awnings as temporary or permanent covers to patios, entrance ways and outdoor eating areas. Natural shade could come from trees and bushes, both of which could be planted for this express purpose if necessary.

Conduct a Shade Audit

You may want to conduct a shade audit to identify existing shade areas in your work environment and determine where additional shade is needed. When considering shade options to protect workers from solar UVR, keep in mind that:

- **Shade needs to be effective.** To evaluate the effectiveness of shade consider both the protection provided by the vegetation and material and also the coverage the shade provides.
- **The quality of shade** from natural sources such as vegetation depends on the density of the foliage, the size of the canopy, the shape of the vegetation and how far the canopy is from the ground.
- **There are different types of shade materials.** Check the Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) rating of the shade material being used. Look for UPF 15 or more to ensure that at least 93% of solar UV radiation is blocked.
- In general, **the larger the structure, the more protection it provides.**
- **Positioning under the shade is important.** Levels of solar UVR are greater near the edge of shaded areas than at the centre.
- **UPF ratings for shade apply to material only.** The overall protection provided also depends on the design of the structure, its placement relative to the sun and how it is used.
- **Portable shade offers limited protection,** but it can provide a quick and cheap solution to shade small numbers of people, and is ideal for places where no other shade options are available. Position it to allow occupants to work away from its sides and openings.

- Existing shade at the worksite, such as buildings, trees and other structures, may provide shade for workers. **Look to relocate jobs to take advantage of existing shade** if possible.
- Bear in mind that **you can never rely on shade alone**. An employee working in the shade may still receive a substantial amount of exposure from indirect sources of solar UV radiation such as reflection from a nearby surface. Always combine shade with personal sun protection measures.

Control Measures - Tips for Success

- Involve employees in designing and/or selecting suitable sun-protective clothing and hats, sunglasses and sunscreen. Ask employees which styles and types they prefer.
- Select a manufacturer or supplier who can respond to the needs of your industry/workers and design or develop new sun-protective products.
- Experiment with new initiatives. Have outdoor workers try samples of sun-protective clothing and equipment and ask for their views. Document the feedback. It is particularly important that any feedback, including complaints about changes to clothing or work practices, is documented as soon as it is received.
- Set an example. Ensure that managers and supervisors observe all safe-sun behaviour and practices.
- Train employees in the use of sun-protective equipment and clothing. There are many misconceptions about the use of sun protection that can be dispelled when workers are informed.

Source: Cancer Council Australia & SafeWork South Australia; [Skin cancer and outdoor work](#)

