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Working Outdoors In Summer

Hot summer months pose special hazards for outdoor workers who must protect themselves against heat, sun exposure, and other hazards. The following is a brief summary of potential hazards and how to control them.

Sun Exposure:

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. Try this test: Place your hand between a single layer of the clothing and a light source. If you can see your hand through the fabric, the garment offers little protection.
- **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. If you are unsure about the sun's intensity, take the shadow test: If your shadow is shorter than you, the sun's rays are the day's strongest.

Heat Exposure:

The combination of heat and humidity can be a serious health threat during the summer months. Here are some precautions to reduce the risk of a heat-related illness:

- 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.

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 outdoors 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 fine-tipped tweezers. *Do not* use petroleum jelly, a hot match, or nail polish to remove the tick.

West Nile Virus:

Illness from 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.

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