

South Dakota Outdoor Workers Practice Sun Safety to Prevent Skin Cancer

Sandra Melstad

At A Glance

South Dakota's Worksite UV Protection Model Policy helps protect outdoor workers from the harmful effects of excessive UV exposure. The South Dakota Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (SDCCCP) and the South Dakota WorkWell Partnership worked with the City of Huron and Rapid City Aquatics to implement the program, which provided education and resources to protect 450 employees from the sun. In 2017, the program expanded to include the City of Britton outdoor staff, this increased the number of employees informed about sun protection options.



Public Health Challenge

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. Each year, nearly 5 million people are treated for skin cancer, and over 9,000 die from melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer. The most common cause of skin cancer is excessive exposure to UV rays from the sun or through artificial tanning. In South Dakota, limiting UV exposure among outdoor seasonal workers is a challenge because the majority of their work is performed outdoors. A solution to protect the

workers was needed, especially from April through September, when UV intensity increases. The SDCCCP/SD WorkWell Partnership recruited two employers to implement sun safety practices to protect their outdoor workers. The worksite wellness programs educated employees about how to protect themselves from the sun during outdoor work.

Find Out More

Applying sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher and wearing protective clothing and gear decrease the risk for skin cancer. Less than 15% of men and 30% of women use sunscreen regularly when outside at peak hours, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and a 2013 Consumer HealthStyles survey. Worksites can protect outdoor employees from UV exposure to help decrease their risk for skin cancer. Read more at https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/pdf/skincancer_employees.pdf.

For decades, our pool employees have always worn swimsuits and tank top-style lifeguard tops. This past summer, we saw a number in short-sleeved shirts, and we had requests for long-sleeved T-shirts.
- Shanna Sterrett,
City of Huron

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Approach

The Worksite UV Protection Model helps employees understand the importance of preventing skin cancer. Education, technical assistance and resources were provided to worksites willing to make sun safety a priority. Two worksites were recruited, and they adopted policies which provided employees with sunscreen and lip balm. Employees were encouraged to wear wide-brimmed hats, long sleeve shirts, lightweight full-length pants, and sunglasses, as well as working in shaded areas and avoiding peak sun hours when possible.

Results

When polled after the project, workers reported an increase in their knowledge of sun safety and how they changed their sun-protective behaviors. Survey respondents were seasonal full-time or part-time outdoor workers, and all 450 of them adopted some form of protective behavior. White men younger than 24 or aged 45 to 54 showed the biggest increases in behavioral changes in the sun. Wearing wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses, and spending less time in the sun or more time in shady areas when possible were the most commonly reported sun protection behaviors adopted. Improvements in skin cancer knowledge and attitudes were also reported.

What's Next

The project provides a framework for other employers to adopt the Worksite UV Protection Model Policy or similar strategies to promote sun safety practices for employees. Now, the SDCCCCP partners with the City of Britton Swimming Pool staff and lifeguards to promote sun safety. The SDCCCCP is also working with Health Management Partners, a provider of health management programs, to support employee participation in sun safety efforts and enforcement of worksite UV protection policies for outdoor workers.