

# Outdoor workers slip up on slopping on sunscreen

18 June 2014, by Sandra Hutchinson

(Medical Xpress)—Providing outdoor workers with free sunscreen is no guarantee they will use it, according to a new study by QUT.

In a study of more than 160 Queensland [outdoor workers](#), published in the Journal of Occupational Health, only 40 per cent admitted they frequently used sunscreen, although it was provided to 93 per cent of workers.

Professor Michael Kimlin and Associate Professor Monika Janda, from QUT's Sun Research Lab, led the study titled What encourages [sun protection](#) among outdoor workers from four industries?

Professor Janda said the building/construction, rural/farming, local government and public sector were industries located in regional or rural Queensland recognised as having a high proportion of outdoor workers and sun protection was a vital part of their health and safety.

"What we found was that more half of the workplaces surveyed had a specific sun protection policy and just more than half of the workers agreed sun protection was enforced at their workplace," she said.

"The good news is that workers who agreed that sun protection was enforced at their workplace reported lower sunburn rates.

"This indicates that enforcing a mandatory sun protection policy could have a measurable effect on workers' actual sun exposure reducing sunburn and skin cancers even if workers do not self-report more protection."

Professor Janda said the uptake of sun protection by outdoor workers was complex and relied on the backing of both the workplace and worker to be successful.

"For example even though almost all workers were

supplied with sunscreen by their employer, it was the least frequently used personal protection measure," she said.

"Applying sunscreen was perceived by many workers as time consuming and uncomfortable due to its greasiness and increase in sweating.

"Therefore increasing the variety of sunscreens available to workers or testing sunscreens to determine a preferred type could increase the uptake in sunscreen use at work."

Professor Janda said a sun protection policy was a necessity in the workplace, but a policy was not sufficient to ensure workers adopted sun safe practices.

"Workplaces need support to follow their policy with actions," Professor Janda said.

"For example providing shade structures or scheduling work hours outside of peak sun times reinforces the importance of sun protection in the workplace."

"In many workplaces we need to change the culture towards sun protection and this is best done by having a policy, acting on that policy and encouraging and supporting staff who adopt that policy."

Other findings:

- 57 per cent of workplaces provide shade structures.
- 43 per cent of workplaces schedule work outside peak sun hours
- 100 per cent of local government employees usually or always wear long sleeved shirts, compared with 39 per cent of public sector workers
- 21 per cent of workplaces provided skin

checks

Professor Michael Kimlin said being exposed to the sun was a significant health issue for workers who spend all day, every day working outside.

"These outdoor workers often receive a high exposure to UV radiation during work hours and have a higher than average risk of skin cancer.

"This study shows there continues to be a need for interventions to promote sun safe behaviour and reduce UVR exposure among outdoor workers, particularly here in Queensland."

**More information:** "What encourages sun protection among outdoor workers from four industries?" *J Occup Health*. 2014;56(1):62-72. Epub 2013 Nov 22.. Janda M, Stoneham M, Youl P, Crane P, Sendall MC, Tenkate T, Kimlin M.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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