

Facilities Management from A to Z



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O

utdoor Workers

Working outdoors sounds an attractive proposition in the Spring sunshine, however outdoor workers are exposed to many types of hazards that depend on their type of work, geographic region, season, and duration of time they are outside. In the FM sector outdoor workers might include cleaners, gardeners, gatekeepers, painters, roofers, building workers, labourers, mechanics, security guards and any other worker who spends time outside.

Hazards affecting outdoor worker include extremes of heat, cold, rain, noise, lightning, and ultraviolet (UV) radiation. All of these can cause serious health problems from heat stroke and sunburn to hypothermia and frostbite. Skin cancer is one of the commonest forms of cancer in the UK and the number of cases is rising every year. About 30-60 people are struck by lightning each year in Britain with an average of three fatalities annually.

There are other non weather related hazards for outdoor workers from insects, wildlife or plants that may sting, pierce or irritate the skin. Depending on the nature of their work and the location there may be additional risks from pesticides or other chemical hazards.

With temperatures rising annually as a result of climate change, exposure to the sun is recognised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as a significant occupational risk factor leading to skin cancer. This means that reasonable and practical measures should be taken to reduce the risk.

These might include including sun protection information in induction courses and routine health and safety training, encouraging staff to keep themselves covered up during the summer months, in particular around midday when the sun is at its hottest. Workwear might include long sleeved shirts and hats with brims or flaps that protect ears and neck.

Staff should be encouraged to use a suitable sunscreen of at least SPF (Sun Protection Factor) 15 on any part of the body they are unable to cover up and to take their breaks in the shade rather than staying outside in the sun. Work should be scheduled to minimise sun exposure and staff asked to check their skin regularly for unusual spots or moles that change size, shape or colour and to seek medical advice promptly if they find anything that causes concern.

The HSE provide a free leaflet to assist employers in briefing staff about the dangers of prolonged sun exposure. "Keep Your Top On" is available from www.hse.gov.uk