

TITLE: SUN SAFE PRACTICES	
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PURPOSE:

To provide guidance on ‘sun safe’ practices for volunteer and employed personnel.

The nature of the profession of surf and open water lifesaving and lifeguarding requires significant time outdoors. This leads to exposure to the elements, including sunlight. Extensive exposure to the ultraviolet rays in sunlight leads to premature ageing, skin damage, skin cancer, and eye damage. This risk is significantly increased in fair-skinned individuals, or those who have suffered severe sunburn in early childhood.

Skin cancer is the most common of all cancers and can be deadly. The three main types are squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), basal cell carcinoma (BCC), and the most aggressive type, melanoma. The prevalence of skin cancer increases with sun exposure, burning or tanning.

It is recommended that promotion of sun safety awareness and behaviour be part of overall beach safety management.

Sun safety facts

1. Skin cancers are caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light.
2. UV light penetrates clouds and can still cause skin damage, contributing to the later development of skin cancer.
3. Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Over two-thirds of Australians will develop some form of skin cancer during their lives.
4. About 1000 people in Australia die each year from skin cancer.
5. Repeated small amounts of exposure to UV or severe skin damage such as sunburn, especially in childhood, damages the skin, increasing the risk of skin cancer in later life.
6. NOTE: both cumulative exposure (without actual ‘sunburn’) and repeated sunburn (not necessarily ‘severe’) contribute to increasing the risk.
7. Severe sunburn, particularly in children, increases the later risk of skin damage and skin cancer.
8. If children are protected from UV light from birth to 17 years of age, they have 75% less risk of developing skin cancer in later life.
9. School, recreation and sport may expose people to the sun for long periods.
10. A suntan is a sign of damaged and weakened skin.
11. The style, type and amount of clothing often worn at the beach does not suit Australia’s intense sunshine with its high levels of UV light.
12. Lifelong participation in outdoor sport and recreation mean many Australians are exposed to dangerously high levels of UV radiation (UVR).
13. 95% of skin cancers can be cured if detected and treated early.
14. UV light also causes eye damage including cataracts, actual cancers of lining of eye and pterygium. This damage may start in childhood.
15. Reflected UV light may cause sunburn even under shelter, and other methods of sun protection are essential.
16. There is no such thing as ‘windburn’ — this is solar damage (the same as ‘sunburn’) from UVR, usually in cloudy weather as UVR easily penetrates clouds.

SCOPE:

This Guideline applies to the following:

- All government authorities and agencies and those organisations responsible for the management and operation of coastal environments; and
- Those organisations experienced in public safety and responsible for the provision of public safety services.

For example:

- Coastal/marine park authorities and managers
- Lifesaving service providers
- Lifeguards and lifeguard supervisors

This Guideline applies to coastal environments, including ocean coastline and saltwater waterways that open to the oceans surrounding Australia.

GUIDELINE DESCRIPTION:

1.0 Shelter

1.1 Lifeguards should use natural or artificial shade as often as practical.

1.2 Materials used to provide shade should cast a dark shadow (i.e. block out UV light to a minimum of 50%).

1.3 Provision of protective covering over lifesaving/lifeguard observation towers is recommended.

1.4 NOTE: It is possible to get sunburn under shelter due to reflection of UVR from sand and water. Other precautions listed must still be used.

2.0 Protective clothing to be worn by lifeguards

2.1 Hats — wide-brimmed (minimum brim width of 8 cm) with dark (non-reflecting) underside of the brim, or 'Legionnaire style' hats that have side pieces protecting the ears and neck.

2.2 Long-sleeved shirts with high neck collars — made of UPF 50+ material (close-weave material that blocks UVR).

2.3 Shorts — loose and long-legged.

3.0 Sunscreen

3.1 Use broad spectrum, water-resistant SPF (sun protection factor) 30+ sunscreen.

3.2 Apply at least 20 minutes before exposure so that cream can be absorbed into the skin, for effective protection.

3.3 Reapply every 2–3 hours, or more often after swimming or sweating heavily.

NOTES:

1. It has recently been shown that sun block lotion does not reduce the incidence of some types of skin cancer (malignant melanomas or BCCs). It does reduce the incidence of the most
2. common dangerous skin cancer (SCCs).
3. Therefore it is essential that other precautions such as natural shade and protective clothing be utilised as well as trying to avoid the most dangerous times of the day: 2 hours either side of midday (11am – 3pm, summer time).
4. A small number of people may be sensitive to some types of sunscreens. If skin rashes occur, choose a brand designed for sensitive skin. (It is important for people who spend as much time outdoors as lifesavers to maintain the highest SPF.)

4.0 Sunglasses

Sunglasses should:

- a. be worn by all lifesavers and lifeguards operating in the outdoors;
- b. be 100% UV resistant, conforming to Australian Standard 1067 (as labelled on the swing tag); and
- c. have side protection from the sun's rays, but which should not obscure peripheral vision.

5.0 Medical assessments

Lifeguards should have medical checks for skin cancers and eye damage.

6.0 Promotion of sun safety behaviours

6.1 Lifeguards should be proactive in promoting sun safety behaviours.

6.2 Lifeguards should at all times act as good role models.

6.3 Lifeguards should also inform those members of the public observed to be at risk.

DEFINITIONS:

BCC – basal cell carcinoma



- 70–85% of all skin cancers
- Most common in people over 40 years of age but can develop in younger people
- Usually develop on the head, neck and upper body. Some appear on the arms and legs
- Small, round or flattened in shape
- Red, pale or pearly in colour
- Slow-growing
- Don't usually spread to other parts of the body
- If left untreated, may grow deeper into the skin and damage nearby tissue. This may make treatment more difficult and increase the chance of the skin cancer coming back

Courtesy: NSW Cancer Council (www.nswcc.org.au)

Lifeguard means ‘an appropriately trained and qualified individual who volunteers or is employed at bathing beaches, pools, etc. to prevent drowning, provide injury prevention and response services, and to save people from drowning’.

Lifesaving service means ‘an organised and structured service comprised of lifeguards and appropriate rescue and first aid equipment supported by a coordinated backup team’.

Observation tower means ‘an elevated platform which provides a lifesaver or lifeguard with an unobstructed view of an area of water and/or beach from either a seated or standing position’.

Occupational health and safety (OHS) means ‘the health and safety considerations of or relating to the activity or business for which one is trained’.

SCC – squamous cell carcinoma



- 15–20% of all skin cancers
- Most common in people aged over 50
- Usually appears on the head, neck, hands and forearms. Less often, it can develop on the upper body or the legs.
- Thickened red, scaly spots, which later may bleed easily or be tender to touch. They can look like a sore that hasn’t healed.
- Grow quickly over several months
- Can spread to other parts of the body.
- SCCs on the lips or the ears have a high risk of spreading and should be seen by a doctor immediately

Courtesy: NSW Cancer Council (www.nswcc.org.au)

UV – ultraviolet

UVR – ultraviolet radiation

REFERENCES:

Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines

- LS1461: Lifeguard occupational health and safety
- LS1462: Zero tolerance on alcohol and drugs
- LS1463: Sun safe practices
- LS1464: Selection and use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- LS1465: Hazards and banning of smoking
- LS1466: Manual handling safety
- LS1467: Managing workplace stress
- LS1468: Rehabilitation from illness or injury

Guidelines for safe recreational water environments. Volume 1 – Coastal and fresh waters. World Health Organization, Geneva, 2003.

Lifeguard Service Operating Procedures Version 1, Surf Life Saving Queensland, February 2005.

Safety management – developing a safety policy – Bulletin WH14.01.03, NT WorkSafe, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, 2003, 4pp.

Surf Life Saving Australia, 2003. Surf lifesaving training manual, 32nd edition. Elsevier Australia Pty Ltd.

Statement on Sun Dangers for Lifeguards, International Life Saving Federation, (September 1998).

Sun Safety, SLSA Policy No. 2.1 (July 2006), Surf Life Saving Australia.

APPENDICES:

Nil