Driving for work:
sun safety guidance resource

Produced by: The Outdoor Worker Subgroup as part of the National Skin Cancer Prevention Plan implementation group.

Purpose: This guidance document is aimed at health & safety officers, safety representatives, employers, supervisors and managers to support them in ensuring that all employees who have an occupational driving role are aware of the potential increased skin cancer risk, are provided with education on skin protective behaviours, are aware of their obligations around skin cancer risk mitigation for those who drive occupationally and support employees in meeting health and safety obligations. It is also relevant to self-employed workers who spend a significant proportion of the time driving.

Background: skin cancer and UV exposure

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation damages skin cells and is recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) as carcinogenic to humans, meaning it can cause cancer.[1] Exposure to UV radiation in sunlight is the main cause of skin cancer, which is now the most common cancer in Ireland, with over 11,000 new cases diagnosed each year and incidence rates continuing to rise.[2]

It's the sun's UV radiation, not heat, that causes sunburn and skin damage. UV radiation can't be seen or felt so you don't know when your skin is being damaged until it's too late. The two main types of UV radiation are: UVA, which is associated with skin ageing. And UVB, which is associated with skin burning.

This represents a significant public health concern and highlights the importance of reducing UV exposure among outdoor workers where feasible.

In Ireland, public health advice is to protect the skin when the UV Index is 3 or above, a level that commonly occurs especially between April and September, even on cloudy days.[3]

However, because UV damage builds up over time, outdoor workers should consider using sun protection all year-round.

Sun exposure is often associated with outdoor activities; however, UV radiation can also be encountered indoors. Sunlight passing through glass windows in buildings and vehicles can still reach the skin therefore people who drive as part of their job are also at risk. Just as prolonged sunlight can gradually fade furniture, carpets, and interior surfaces, it can also cause cumulative damage to the skin.[4] While individual exposures through windows may be relatively low, their combined effect over time contributes to overall UV dose and increases skin cancer risk.[4]

In addition to its effects on the skin, chronic UV exposure can damage the eyes, contributing to corneal injury and increasing the risk of cataract formation. The purpose of this document is to raise awareness of this occupational risk, support informed preventive measures, and help reduce long-term skin cancer risk among people who drive for work.

Why occupational drivers are a priority group

Occupational drivers spend prolonged periods in vehicles as part of their working day. UVA radiation can penetrate glass on the vehicle side windows and can contribute to cumulative exposure over time.[5]

The level of protection provided by a window varies depending on type and vehicle design.[6]

Research shows that skin cancers occur more frequently on the window-exposed side of the body, supporting the risk associated with cumulative UV exposure while driving.[5]

This exposure pattern is effectively illustrated in Figure 1, which shows a 60-year-old truck driver with well-defined sun spots (solar lentigines) predominantly on the window-exposed side of the neck after years of cumulative ultraviolet radiation exposure.

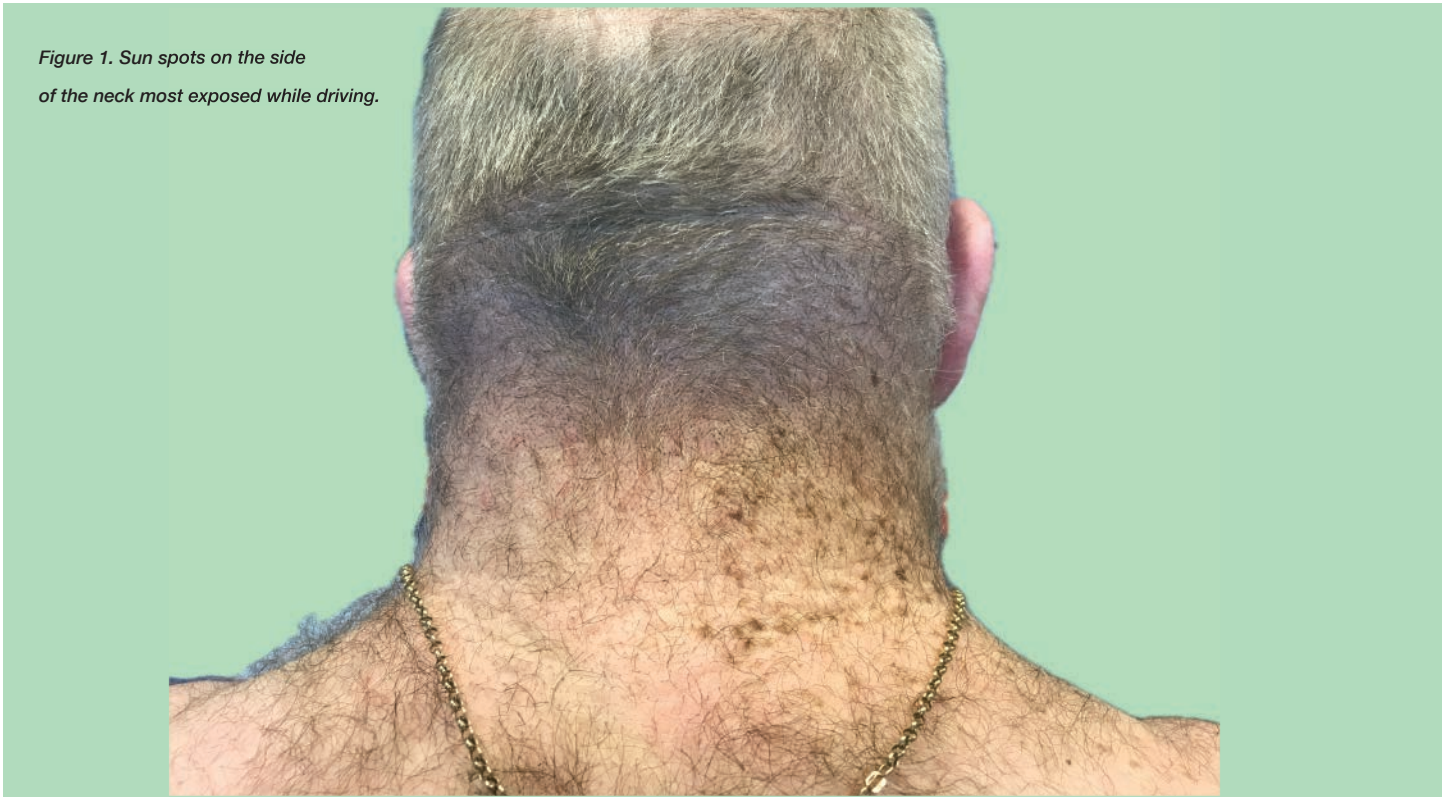

Figure 1. Sun spots on the side of the neck most exposed while driving.

Image courtesy of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital; patient consent obtained.

Recommendations for employers

Employers have a legal duty under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to identify, assess, and control risks to employees' health and safety.[7] Risks to health and safety include exposure to 'physical agents' such as UV radiation.

Occupational driving refers to when driving is a work activity, rather than a commute. Employers should therefore ensure that sun exposure risks associated with driving for work are addressed in the same way as other occupational hazards.

The following recommendations outline how employers can create a workplace environment that actively supports sun protection and reduces long-term skin cancer risk among their employees.

Integrate UV Risk into workplace health and safety policies

- Include solar UV exposure in existing health and safety documentation and processes, and alongside management of other recognised hazards such as fatigue and manual handling.
- Ensure sun protection measures are embedded within existing safety management systems rather than treated as optional advice.

Education, training and awareness

- Provide employee training on:
  - The risks of UV radiation and that standard windows may not protect against all UV radiation.
  - Practical SunSmart behaviours during work, including appropriate use of protective clothing, sunscreen, hats, and sunglasses.
  - Checking their skin regularly and seeking prompt advice from their GP if they notice any changes.
- Promote SunSmart messages through organisational communication channels e.g. newsletter, social media platforms, e-mail bulletins, notice boards and safety briefings.
- Use the UV Index (≥3) as a trigger for seasonal reminders, toolbox talks, and safety alerts.
- Include information on the organisation's SunSmart Policy as part of induction for new employees.

Vehicle protective equipment

- Vehicle sun visors: ensure all driver and passenger sun visors are present, functional, and adjustable to block direct sunlight.
- Vehicle windows: consider fleet vehicle specifications and where possible source vehicles with window UV protection provided.
- Glare: do not place items near the driver which may increase glare / reflection.

- UV blocking window film/tints:
  - UV-absorbing window films have been shown to significantly reduce UV exposure.[8], and are recommended by skin cancer prevention organisations in Australia and America.[4,9]
  - Where appropriate, consider fitting UV-blocking window films to fleet vehicles, provided they comply with vehicle visibility and safety specifications.

Regulatory note: Window film or tints must comply with EU Regulation 2018/858, which governs vehicle type approval and safety standards. Under European legislation windscreens and front side windows must have a minimum light transmittance of 70%.[10] A tinted sun strip on the windscreen may be acceptable provided it does not extend below the top of the windscreen wipers and does not impair driver visibility.

This EU legislation is a legally binding across the EU.

Furthermore, the EU requirements for roadworthiness testing are outlined in Directive 2014/45/EU, which was given effect in Ireland by S.I. No. 415/2017 as amended (NCT) and S.I. No. 347/2013 as amended (CVRT). During a vehicle's roadworthiness inspection, a vehicle's windscreen and front side windows must have a minimum light transmittance of 65%, this allows for some degradation of the glass transparency throughout the vehicle's life.

More information can be found on the Road Safety Authority (RSA) website – www.rsa.ie

Work organisation and environment (administrative controls)

- Where feasible, plan work schedules and routes to reduce driving during peak UV hours, (usually between 11am and 3pm).
- Plan driver breaks and rotation of drivers on long or high-exposure routes to limit cumulative UV exposure.
- Ensure air-conditioning systems are functional in all vehicles, this will support drivers to keep windows closed. It is also recognised that higher temperatures can negatively impact cognitive performance.[11]

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Sunscreen: Make broad-spectrum sunscreen, SPF 30 or higher, available to drivers and encourage routine use.
- Sun-protective clothing and sunglasses: Provide PPE where needed that meets UV protection safety standards

Record keeping and compliance

- Keep documented evidence of training, risk assessments, PPE issued, and control measures to demonstrate compliance with legal obligations under workplace health and safety legislation.

Consultation

Sun protection measures are most effective when employees are involved. Therefore, consult workers regularly, encourage feedback and consider their practical experience when introducing or reviewing sun protection initiatives.

Sample policies, framework and risk assessments are available to view and download from **www.healthyworkplace.ie/resource-hub/** The resources have been developed for employers of outdoor workers to deliver a focused approach to support SunSmart awareness and behaviours among outdoor workers.

More general SunSmart leaflets and posters are now available to download and order on **www.healthpromotion.ie** Choose 'cancer' from the drop-down menu.

Recommendations to provide to workers (occupational drivers): day-to-day actions

Know when sun protection is needed:

- Review your UV exposure regularly. Think about how long you spend outside and be ready with sun protection measures.
- Check the daily UV Index before starting work by visiting the Met Éireann website; www.met.ie/uv-index or checking the weather app on your phone

Then follow the Healthy Ireland SunSmart 5 steps:[3]

SLIP on clothing - Wear protective clothing

- Wear long-sleeved tops, collared shirts, and long trousers where feasible.
- Clothing made from tightly woven fabrics or UPF-rated workwear provides better UV protection.
- Clothing is one of the most effective and reliable forms of sun protection for drivers who spend long hours seated. UV Standard 801/EN 13758 Textiles- solar UV protective properties; provide information on the protective properties of clothing against UVR (EU-OSHA)

SLOP on sunscreen - Use sunscreen on exposed skin

- Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30+ to all exposed skin, including face and ears, neck, hands and forearms.
- Apply sunscreen generously 20 minutes before starting work and reapply every two hours or more often if sweating.
- Ensure sunscreen offers protection against both UVB and UVA radiation.Check the front label of the bottle for the phrase "Broad Spectrum," which confirms protection against both UVA and UVB radiation.
- A lip balm containing SPF30+ or higher is also recommended.
- Sunscreen should be easily accessible to workers and expiry dates checked regularly.
- Sunscreen should be used in addition to, not instead of, protective clothing.

SLAP on a hat

- Consider wearing a wide-brimmed or bucket-style hat especially when outside the vehicle because it shades the face, head, neck and ears.

SEEK shade

- Seek shade during breaks, particularly around midday when UV levels are highest.
- Keeping windows closed when driving reduces direct sun exposure and supports air-conditioning as well as overall driving comfort.

SLIDE on sunglasses - Wear UV-protective sunglasses

- Wear sunglasses that provide 100% UVA and UVB protection and are suitable for safe driving.
- Sunglasses should meet the EN 170/EN 172 standards to protect eyes from solar UV radiation.
- Sunglasses can protect the eyes and surrounding skin from UV damage. Sunglasses can also reduce glare and improve visual comfort.

Check your skin regularly

- Be familiar with your skin and check regularly for new or changing moles, freckles, or lesions.

For example, visit the Irish Skin Foundation's website for leaflets on protecting and inspecting your skin: **https://irishskin.ie/sunsmart/**

- Seek advice from your GP promptly if you have any concerns regarding new or changing moles, freckles or lesions.

Quick checklists

Worker daily checklist

- ❑ Check UV index (protect when ≥3).
- ❑ Sunscreen SPF 30+ on exposed skin.
- ❑ Long sleeves / protective clothing where feasible.
- ❑ Wide brimmed hat for when you get out of the vehicle.
- ❑ Keep window up with air con on.
- ❑ UV-protective sunglasses (driving-safe).
- ❑ Follow RSA guidance on their website at www.rsa.ie (visor, clean windscreen, slow down if dazzled).

Employer checklist

- ❑ Include solar UV exposure in risk assessments for driving roles.
- ❑ Provide sun protection information to employees.
- ❑ Provide SPF 30+ sunscreen.
- ❑ Consider providing wide brimmed hats and sunglasses to employees.
- ❑ Consider UV-protective films/glazing only with visibility/legal compliance (≥65% visible light transmission (VLT) front windows).
- ❑ Ensure drivers are aware of UV and glare protective measures.

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