

DELIVERING A NEW SUN SAFETY STRATEGY



Delivering letters and parcels to more than 29 million addresses across the UK, six days a week, means that a significant number of Royal Mail workers spend the majority of their working day outside, come rain or shine. It follows that the Group naturally covers weather conditions as part of its overall safety and health risk management programme.

Solar radiation risks feature as part of the Royal Mail Group's severe weather guidance – it covers floods and icy and snowy conditions as well as sun exposure and heatwaves. The guidance and online risk assessment tool allow local managers to make judgment calls about the conditions they face, based on personal experiences and data from organisations including the Met Office, Environment Agency and Highways Agency. Accounts from employees on different shifts and in different locations are also considered. The idea is to give the responsibility to local managers to assess the risks facing their teams and to take the right action, from briefing sessions with their team, right through to suspending a collection or delivery. The risk assessment tool used across the business is more focused on extreme conditions, and because Royal Mail recognises that solar radiation exposure at even moderate levels can be a risk, it supplements the severe weather guidance with additional specific advice on sun safety on its intranet and business screens.

Royal Mail Group offers wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved tops and trousers as part of its uniform – all approved by the British Association of Dermatologists for ultraviolet radiation protection. Staff working outside are encouraged to use them during the higher UV months. Covering up with the right clothing is seen as the best protection tactic for most outdoor workers in the business. The Group doesn't provide sunscreen – research has shown that offering sun cream can lead to more sun risk-taking activity (for example, relying on sunscreen

exclusively for protection rather than covering up, or forgetting to reapply sunscreen frequently enough). Research has also suggested that those most exposed are the least likely to follow guidance on applying sun cream. In addition to providing the right clothing, the focus at Royal Mail is on awareness-raising and education to help change behaviours.

NEW SURVEY

This year has seen the Royal Mail approach to sun safety refined and developed further. Shaun Davis, Group Director of Safety, Health, Wellbeing and Sustainability, says: "When I joined Royal Mail three years ago it quickly became apparent that there was an opportunity to strengthen our wellbeing and sustainability strategy in the area of outdoor worker protection. Because of the predominantly outdoor nature of our work and the absolute requirement to keep our people safe and healthy, sun safety was an obvious area for me to explore. I've done this via a formal research study, allowing me to not only develop our sun safety strategy, but also share our organisational findings through an academic journal* so that others can learn from and build on the work we've done here."



Royal Mail Group's sun safety strategy now puts even more emphasis on raising awareness of the risks of working in the sun without protection, and encourages thousands of workers to cover up during periods of powerful UV radiation

As part of his study, Shaun led a survey of the Royal Mail workforce, aiming to use the results to refresh the Group's approach to solar radiation risks. Fifty-five per cent of respondents to the survey, involving over 1,150 employees, were postal workers who spent most of their working life outdoors. The survey focused on how workers' attitudes to sun protection measures were linked to what they actually did in practice to protect themselves from harmful UV radiation. Shaun wanted to understand how strong a role attitudes played in an area of protection that can rely very heavily on individual behaviour. "We know that we can offer guidance and procedures, and issue the right clothing and equipment, but unless people understand why it's important to follow the processes and use the kit, we're going to struggle to improve levels of protection in a workforce that's largely 'on the move'," he says.

The survey results showed that the level of perceived risk of getting skin cancer is strongly associated with using protective measures – in other words, the better people understood that skin cancer was a risk, the more likely they were to follow what Shaun calls 'sun safe behaviours'. Not surprisingly, employees with skin types at the lower end of the Fitzpatrick skin scale** were more knowledgeable and proactive in using solar radiation protection measures. Nearly 640 members of staff revealed that they regularly checked their skin for early signs of cancer, but only 385 felt they'd received some form of 'training' for sun safety in the workplace, despite past publicity campaigns delivered in-house. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed were men. Men were more knowledgeable about sun protection but women were more likely to be aware of the risks of sun exposure, and to take steps to protect themselves.

Royal Mail's decision to concentrate on encouraging employees to cover up with clothing rather than use sunscreen was backed up by another finding in the survey – 55 per cent of people mistakenly believed that sunscreen with an SPF of 30 only needed to be applied once a day.

So, raising awareness of the risks of getting skin cancer is clearly the first step – and essential – in creating better levels of protection. As Shaun comments: "Sun safety training and awareness has to be the first line of defence."

NEW STRATEGIC EMPHASIS

Armed with the survey findings, Shaun and his team have developed a new emphasis for their sun safety strategy for 2015/16:

- launching an earlier awareness campaign than in previous years. This year, the campaign kicks off in April, just at the start of the months when the strongest (and potentially most dangerous) levels of solar radiation are likely in the UK
- putting more emphasis on the severe weather risk assessment programme, and reminding managers that it doesn't just cover so-called 'bad weather', but all weather that could present a risk
- delivering more frequent positive reinforcements of the message. The team will be running slots in the in-house TV programme RMTv, adding articles to Courier, the company-wide magazine, and featuring articles and downloadable posters on myroyalmail.com, the company's extranet. A new 'worktime learning' slot will also be added to the weekly toolbox talk menu
- distributing handy wallet cards to all colleagues as part of its awareness campaign. The cards, created with IOSH, not only remind workers of the basic steps they need to take to protect themselves on high UV days, but also give a quick reminder of the signs of skin damage to look out for
- continuing to promote its 'Stay safe in the sun' messages:
 - cover up
 - protect your head
 - take your break in the shade
 - use sunscreen on any exposed skin
 - be 'skin safe'

"We're really promoting the fact that covering up is the main focus. Wearing the right clothing to protect yourself from the sun's rays gives the best direct protection, as long as workers are supplementing with sunscreen where they need to. We know that getting workforce engagement in our programme is absolutely crucial, and we've been working with our national and regional teams, and also in partnership with the Communication Workers Union, to get the message out there that taking a few simple steps can protect people who work outside for a living from getting the most common type of cancer in the world," adds Shaun.

The Royal Mail Group will be testing the effectiveness of its new approach in an impact measurement exercise later in 2015.

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*UK postal delivery workers' sun safety knowledge and behaviour, Houdmont J, Griffiths A & Davis S (2015), under review, *Journal of Occupational Medicine*.

**The Fitzpatrick skin scale categorises skin types from I to VI, and classifies the typical response of different types of skin to ultraviolet radiation.

ROYAL MAIL'S 'STAY SAFE IN THE SUN' CAMPAIGN

1 COVER UP

Wear long, loose clothing to keep the sun off your skin. Your uniform is made from a special fabric to protect against ultraviolet radiation

2 PROTECT YOUR HEAD

Don't forget your head, face, ears and neck. Wear the wide brim hat that's part of your uniform – it's specially treated to protect against the sun. Remember to use sunglasses with UV protection

3 TAKE YOUR BREAK IN THE SHADE

Come out of the sun when you have the chance, especially during the most powerful ultraviolet periods

4 USE SUNSCREEN

Use SPF 30 or higher on any exposed skin – apply it half an hour before going outside, put plenty on and reapply it frequently

5 BE SKIN SAFE

Report mole changes (size, shape, colour, itching or bleeding) or any other concerns about your skin to your doctor as soon as possible – don't put it off, early treatment is important



Shaun Davis, Group Director of Safety, Health, Wellbeing and Sustainability, Royal Mail Group, surveyed a sample of the workforce to gauge attitudes to sun safety

“Sun safety training and awareness has to be the first line of defence”

GOOD PRACTICE TAKEAWAYS

Developing your sun safety strategy

- Get people involved and informed right across the business, including senior managers, any local networks and representative groups.
- Find out what the attitudes and any barriers are to 'sun safe' practices in your business – survey your workers. It doesn't have to be a full, formal survey, a simple poll with a few key questions should give you the right steer to develop your programme. And running a survey or poll raises awareness of the issue in itself, so it should form a positive part of your programme too.
- As ultraviolet radiation can be a problem from UV level 3 upwards, make sure that sun safety is seen as an issue to focus on across the entire 'moderate to high' ultraviolet radiation period – not just seen as an extreme or 'hot weather' challenge. Choose your timing carefully – your campaign needs to reach workers when UV levels are starting to climb, not at the beginning of the summer season.
- If you're planning an in-house awareness-raising campaign, schedule in messaging across all the right channels, to make sure you reach as many people as possible, and to reinforce messaging.
- Once you've made your protection choices, make your thinking clear to workers – for example, if you're asking workers to wear long sleeved clothing to protect themselves from the sun's rays, rather than asking them to use sunscreen on their arms, explain why. Be very straightforward about what you're asking people to do, and keep your communications as simple and brief as possible.
- Tackle the myths head-on – from misperceptions about the climate, through the damage the sun's rays can do even in colder temperatures, to how much UV radiation gets through cloud cover.
- Consider handing out cards or short flyers to reinforce your messaging. If you include information on checking for signs of skin cancer too, people are more likely to keep and refer back to them. Make your messaging as visual as possible to appeal to a wider audience.
- At the end of your annual sun safety programme, test how effective it was with a simple follow-up questionnaire or other impact measurement exercise – then you can use the findings to adjust and improve the following year's programme.

Do you have a good practice initiative to share? Get in touch with us at campaigns@iosh.co.uk.

Go to www.notimetolose.org.uk to download free resources to help you tackle solar radiation risks.



WORKING TOGETHER TO BEAT OCCUPATIONAL CANCER

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health is campaigning to stop thousands of untimely deaths to work-caused cancer – find out more at

www.notimetolose.org.uk