Outdoor Workers and Sun Safety: A Mixed-Methods Project to Improve Sun Protection

Two case study examples

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Funded by Queensland Health
Skin cancer is a major public health issue in Australia, with Queensland having the highest rates of skin cancer in the world.

Outdoor workers are at risk of sun damage and sun-related diseases.
The Outdoor Worker Sun Protection Project aimed to identify the most effective sun protection strategies for outdoor workers.
Location of Workplaces Across Queensland
Recruitment and Data Collection

14 workplaces

- Building and Construction
- Farming/Rural
- Local Government
- Public Sector

Face-to-face interviews with workplace representatives

Worker discussion groups
The participatory action research process aimed to assist workplaces to work through the following six (6) sun protection strategies:

- Policy
- Skin Screening
- Environment
- Role Modelling
- Education and Awareness
- PPE
Two Case Studies

Goondiwindi Regional Council

Site Profile
- Regional: South East Queensland
- Latitude: 27.27
- Longitude: 149.01
- Average summer temp: 20°C
- Average winter temp: 10°C

Industry: Government
Worldwide Size: Small
Workplace Champion: Helen Smid-North
Senior Workplace Advisor: Margaret Backer, 2017

Challenges & Successes

Key Success Factors
- Workplace champion
- Effective communication processes
- Lending organizational support
- Achieving the Fast Talk Action Plan
- Accountable existing stakeholders
- Using innovative solutions

Challenges
- Budget
- Responding to harmonisation
- Addressing workplace culture
- Ensuring good site monitoring
- Racing awareness
- Involving all stakeholders

Final Discussion Group

Future Directions

Policy
- The Sun Safety policy was approved in May 2015
- Role Modelling
- Employees are expected to model the sun safety practices

Skin Screening
- In the past 12 months, two hundred and fifty employees have been screened

Environment
- Purchasing agreements were made with suppliers who have screening programs

Discussion
- Worker suggested sun safety was more important and must be considered for future sun safety policy

18 baseline surveys
24 follow-up surveys
5 site visits completed

Sweet's Strawberry Runners

Site Profile
- Region: Darling Downs
- Latitude: 27.17
- Longitude: 149.01
- Average summer temp: 20°C
- Average winter temp: 10°C

Industry: Food
Workforce Size: Small
Workplace Champion: Darcy and Susan Smith, Owners
Senior Workplace Advisor: Margaret Backer, 2017

Challenges & Successes

Key Success Factors
- Workplace champion
- Effective communication processes
- Lending organizational support
- Achieving the Fast Talk Action Plan
- Accountable existing stakeholders
- Using innovative solutions

Challenges
- Lack of time
- Lack of practical solutions

Final Discussion Group

Future Directions

Policy
- All employees and volunteers will be required to wear sun protection while working
- Role Modelling
- Managers are setting the role model

Skin Screening
- In the past 12 months, two hundred and fifty employees have been screened

Environment
- Sun protection materials, including sunscreen, will be made available for purchase

Education and Awareness
- Sun protection materials, including sunscreen, will be made available for purchase
- Role Modelling
- Managers are setting the role model

PPE
- Managers are required to wear sun protection while working
## Goondiwindi Regional Council

### Site Profile
- **Region:** Darling Downs
- **Latitude:** 28.3°
- **Longitude:** 151.19°
- **Average summer UV:** 12 - extreme
- **Industry:** Government
- **Workforce Size:** Large
- **Workplace Champion:** Andrew Singh, WHSC
- **Senior Workplace Advisor:** Marguerite Sendall, QUT

### Existing Sun Safety Measures
- **Environment**
  - No portable or artificial shade at worksites
  - Natural shade advised
- **Policy**
  - Work hours are not scheduled outside 10-3 but they start earlier at 6 and finish earlier at 4 in summer time.
- **Education and Awareness**
  - A tool box talk on working in the sun at induction
  - A skin cancer awareness session by Cancer Council
- **PPE**
  - Broad brimmed hat
  - Shorts supplied, not long trousers.
  - Long sleeve collared shirts

### Discussion Group
- *Outdoor Workers thoughts on sun safety*
  - Workers suggested sun safety was common sense and were unsure if there was a current sun safety policy.

### 18 Baseline surveys
- 24 follow-up surveys
- 3 site visits completed
Goondiwindi Regional Council

Challenges & Successes

Key Success Factors

- Workplace champion
- Effective communication processes
- Gaining organisational support
- Actioning the Sun Safe Action Plan
- Accessing existing resources
- Using dosimeter badges

Challenges

- Budget
- Responding to Harmonisation
- Addressing workplace culture
- Encouraging good role modelling
- Raising awareness
- Accessing skin examinations

Final Discussion Group

- Workers wear wide brimmed hats, not caps.
- Very few workers wear sunscreen, too greasy.
- We don’t have to wear long pants, but can if we choose.

Future Directions

- We will keep on doing the same thing. Continue gathering management support and keeping it on the agenda. Keep the momentum on sun safety going. (Workplace Champion)
Goondiwindi Regional Council

- Workplace champion
- Gaining organisational support
- Addressing workplace culture
- Accessing skin examinations
Goondiwindi Regional Council

Workplace champion

Addressing workplace culture

Gaining organisational support

Accessing skin examinations
Goondiwindi Regional Council

- Workplace champion
- Gaining organisational support
- Addressing workplace culture
- Accessing skin examinations
Goondiwindi Regional Council

Workplace champion

Gaining organisational support

Addressing workplace culture

Accessing skin examinations
ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW – WHAT WORKED?

POLICY
- The Sun Safety policy was endorsed by all directors in May 2012

ROLE MODELLING
- Some of the site managers are good role models and some are not too concerned.

SKIN SCREENING
- On site skin checks were too costly and the local GPs don’t want to be involved due to Medicare limitations

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS
- Toolbox talk on working in the sun once a year
- Sun safety induction

ENVIRONMENT
- Purchasing agreements now state all new vehicles will have tinting

PPE
- No long pants have been supplied.
- Sunglasses now meet the Australian standards of UV protection
**POLICY**
- The Sun Safety policy was endorsed by all directors in May 2012

**EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**
- ? Toolbox talk on working in the sun once a year
- ✓ Sun safety induction

**PPE**
- ✗ No long pants have been supplied.
- ✓ Sunglasses now meet the Australian standards of UV protection
**SWEET’S STRAWBERRY RUNNERS**

**SITE PROFILE**
- **Region:** Darling Downs
- **Latitude:** 28.7°
- **Longitude:** 151.93°
- **Average Summer UV:** 12 - extreme
- **Industry:** Rural
- **Workforce Size:** Small
- **Workplace Champion:** Wally and Leanne Sweet, Owners
- **Senior Workplace Advisor:** Marguerite Sendall, QUT

**EXISTING SUN SAFETY MEASURES**
- **Environment**
  - Vehicle windows are tinted
- **Policy**
  - WHS policy refers to procedures and PPE
- **Environment**
  - Some work hours are scheduled outside 10am - 3pm.
  - Advise workers to use natural shade and provide portable/artificial shade at work sites. Shade provided on some equipment.
- **Education**
  - Use of sun-safe PPE included in induction.
- **PPE**
  - Workers provided: drinking water, SPF 30+ sunscreen, sunglasses.

**DISCUSSION GROUP**
*Outdoor Workers thoughts on sun safety*
- Workers actively wear a hat and sunglasses.
- Some wear long sleeves in the winter “because it is cold”.
- Workers seek shade at break times.
- Workers felt they were responsible for looking after themselves and felt that SSR was too fussy about sun safety.

- **Surveys**
  - 11 baseline surveys completed
  - 3 site visits
  - 8 follow-up surveys
Sweet’s Strawberry Runners

CHALLENGES & SUCCESSES

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Worker Input and feedback
- Enthusiasm for sustainability
- Ownership of sun safety
- Provision of support and resources

RESULTS

In a typical week, how often do you wear...

- Broad-brimmed hat
- Long-sleeved collared shirt
- Long trousers
- Enclosed boots/shoes
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen

0 50 100 % responded ‘always’

- pre, post

CHALLENGES

- Lack of time
- Lack of practical solutions
- Poor timing
- Availability of community educators in a rural area

FINAL DISCUSSION GROUP

- "Old habits die hard", "in Australian males, change isn’t easy" - workers felt as if it was difficult to change, that they knew what they needed to do and it was up to them to make their own decisions in regards to being sun safe.
- Workers felt the long clothes might be too hot and too uncomfortable.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- SSR want the policy to be a flexible document which is owned by their workers and hope it will encourage communication and input from their staff. (Workplace Champion)
- SSR plan to maintain enthusiasm and commitment to these sun protection strategies by 1) reviewing the SSA plan, 2) adding new things when needed, 3) keeping things up-to-date and 4) keep staff involved at staff meetings. Specifically, SSR plan to take staff ideas on board and listen to their feedback.
Sweet’s Strawberry Runners

Ownership of sun safety
Sweet’s Strawberry Runners
Lack of time
Sweet's Strawberry Runners

ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW – WHAT WORKED?

POLICY
- All newly procured vehicles will have tinted windows and air conditioning and all tractors will have a roof.

ROLE MODELLING
- Managers are willing to role model sun safety.

SKIN SCREENING
- Workers provided with 1 hour paid leave to go the GP for a skin exam.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS
- Sun safe messages: induction; toolbox talk; meetings; memos; pay slips.
- Workers were interested in the dosimeter values. They wanted to know if it decreased when worn under long sleeves.
- Posters with colourful pictures were well-received and helped those with English as a second language.
- Sun safe resources not available in other languages.

ENVIRONMENT
- Shades were fitted on to the scorching tractors, the irrigators and over the diesel pump.
- Investigating a machine which is covered for “chipping” work.

PPE
- Irrigation workers felt that long sleeved shirts and long pants might get wet and stay wet for the rest of the shift.
- Some workers felt uniform changes were to protect the company from litigation.
**SKIN SCREENING**
- Workers provided with 1 hour paid leave to go the GP for a skin exam.

**ENVIRONMENT**
- Shades were fitted on to the scuffling tractors, the irrigators and over the diesel pump.
- Investigating a machine which is covered for “chipping” work.
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A dedicated support team and workplace champion are essential to achieve optimal sun protection in the workplace.

The participatory action research approach facilitated identification of enablers and barriers within each workplace.

The challenges for overcoming the barriers are different in each workplace.
QUT Outdoor Worker
Sun Protection Project

Goondiwindi Regional Council

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