

**International Life Saving Federation
Medical Commission**

STATEMENT ON SUN DANGERS FOR THE LIFEGUARD

Approved by the ILS Board of Directors: September 26, 1998

BACKGROUND

The nature of the profession of lifesaving requires significant time outdoors. This leads to exposure to the elements which includes sunlight. Extensive exposure to the ultraviolet rays in sunlight leads to premature aging, 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, basal cell carcinoma, and the most aggressive type, melanoma. The prevalence of skin cancer increases with sun exposure, burning or tanning.

Ninety-five percent of skin cancer can be cured if detected early. Therefore, individuals such as lifeguards who have significant sun exposure should have regular screening for skin cancer, at least once per year.

New moles, changing moles, or scaly, crusty, raised skin lesions should be evaluated by a qualified physician. Enlargement, notching, itching, bleeding or color change in a pre-existing mole is a warning sign.

Avoidance of sun exposure especially during peak times of the day is helpful in reducing skin damage and cancer risk. This can be accomplished by appropriate shelter at guard stations, tightly woven long sleeve clothing, wide brimmed hats, and frequent and thorough use of water resistant sun screen. Sunscreen should be a minimum SPF 30 or greater. It should be applied 15 to 30 minutes prior to sun exposure and should be used even on cloudy days as UV light penetrates clouds and causes skin burning. Sun screen should be applied with extra care to the lips, ears, nose, shoulders and head. It should be re-applied every 2 – 3 hours or more often if swimming, or sweating profusely.

Lifeguards and other personnel who experience significant skin cancer may not in some instances be able to continue employment in outdoor activities. This situation may have a substantial financial impact on the individual and the organization.

The UV rays in sunlight can also seriously damage the eyes. Sun damage can contribute to cataracts, macular degeneration, corneal damage, and pterygiums. Eye protection should consist of good quality sunglasses in addition to shade and hats. Sunglasses should offer 99 - 100% protection from UVA and UVB light as well as screening out 75 - 95% of the visible light. They should be breakage resistant with brown, grey, green, or amber lenses. Wraparound style and polarization are advised to help reduce glare and eye fatigue, but must not obstruct peripheral vision.

STATEMENT

1. Lifeguarding is a high-risk occupation for the development of skin cancer due to extensive sun exposure. All professional and volunteer lifeguard organizations should have mandatory sun protection policies. These policies should include:

- A. Appropriate education on the dangers of sun exposure.
- B. Mandatory requirements for the use of wide brim hats, tightly-woven 50 (or more) rated clothing, minimum SPF 30 sunscreen.
- C. The mandatory provision of minimum SPF 30 sunscreen and adequate natural or artificial shade for all personnel on duty.
- D. Yearly skin cancer checks and eye exams for all employees.
- E. Mandatory use of quality 100% UV protection sunglasses with side protection which does not obscure peripheral vision.

2. All lifeguard agencies are encouraged to support their employees in obtaining qualified physician evaluation of any suspicious skin lesions, treatment of such lesions, and employment modification as necessary.

3. All lifeguards and lifeguard organizations should be at the forefront of public education on the dangers of sun exposure and skin cancer. They should be instructive in the avoidance of sun damage including the use of clothing, sunscreen, hats and sunglasses and promote these principles by example.

REFERENCES

The United States Lifesaving Association Manual of Open Water Lifesaving (ISBN #08359-4919-2)

Proceedings of the International Life Saving Federation International Medical-Rescue Conference, September 1997, San Diego, California

Surf Life Saving Australia Policy Statements

Public Health Hazards to Lifeguards from Sun Exposure, Special Report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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