

Field of the Year winner attests to sun's dangers

WORK FOR A SMALL UNIVERSITY in Central Florida where I have been employed for almost 10 years. Some of you may have heard of Stetson University in DeLand; we have won the STMA College Softball Field of the Year for the past 2 years. I am the Field Maintenance Tech/Turf manager for the field. Before working at the complex, I was the grounds coordinator for the entire 180-acre campus. Over the past 41 years of work, including 25 years with the fire department, I have owned both a foliage nursery and a lawn care business. I grew up in Florida, played sports and spent many hours outdoors.

This magazine asked me what the most important piece of clothing is that I put on

before going to work each day. Just as we don personal protection equipment (PPE) such as masks, protective suits, rubber gloves, and breathing protection before we apply herbicides and other pesticides and safety glasses, ear plugs and gloves before operating some of our equipment, those of us who work outside must also protect ourselves from the sun.

Experts recommend hats with 2-3 inch brims or larger; those with UV protection are even a more effective option. Dermatologists and the American Cancer Society suggest that ball caps do not offer enough protection since the tops of the ears, nose, and neck are highly susceptible to the sun.

There are many types of clothing on the market today including both pants and

shirts that offer some type of ultraviolet B rays (UVB) protection rating from 15 to 50 (UPF) ultraviolet protection factor. The higher the number is, the greater the protection. Darker colors offer more protection than lighter colors. Many larger department stores offer this line of clothing, as well as some of the large sporting goods stores and retailers of outdoor clothing. Protective gear of this type can be expensive, but it wears well, and certainly helps to protect us.

Look for sunglasses that give both UVA and UVB protection from 99-100%.

Sunglasses are a very important part of our attire since we spend most of our time outdoors in daylight hours. Look for sunglasses that give both UVA and UVB protection from 99-100%. Sunglasses should have a listing of UV400 (400nm is the wavelength of UVA radiation.) All sunglasses block UVB radiation. Excessive exposure to the sun's rays unprotected can cause cataracts later in life. If you are blue-eyed like I am, your eyes will be even more light sensitive. Regardless of whether or not the sun is often visible where you live UV rays are still there. UV rays at their peak are found in high altitudes, snow-covered landscapes, or bodies of water.

I know that some of you are reading this wondering, what is the most important piece of clothing I wear to work? While all the items mentioned above are very important, the thing I put on that is most important to me is not clothing but SUN-SCREEN. The UV rays given off from the sun can be beneficial by giving us vitamin D which helps strengthen bone, and teeth, and aids in the prevention of Ricketts and colon cancer.

Unfortunately, the rays are invisible and we can easily absorb too many, too fast. Sunscreen with a minimum rating of SPF 15 is recommended by the American Cancer Society. Sunscreen can fight the early signs of skin cancer, and yes ladies, help prevent wrinkles from too much sun exposure. You are 12 times more likely to develop solar keratoses (SKs) skin damage when not using sunscreen. The peak hours of the sun which are from 10am-2pm are 10 times more damaging than any other time of the day.



Sun illustration courtesy of istockphoto.com

A rule of thumb is that if your shadow is longer than you, UV exposure is low, or if your shadow is shorter than you, UV exposure is high. I know that in our line of work we can not change the hours we're exposed to the peak time of UV rays, but we can change the protection we use.

I remember as a young person camping on the beach with the Boy Scouts. We had a beautiful full moon that night, with the most beautiful blue sky you have ever seen the next day. We fished and swam all day and had a great time not to mention the fish we caught and ate right there on the beach. I also remember the terrible sunburn I had, the trouble standing up because of the pain in my legs, not being able to wear clothes, and the pain while my mother rubbed me down with lotion for days. That was not the only sunburn I've had, or the problems sun exposure has given me since.

The dermatologists and cancer societies report that most of our sun damage occurs before our 18th birthday. It just happens to show up later in life and the older we get, the more problems we have. However this is not true in all cases, as melanoma cases are on the rise in young people.

I tell you this from experience; I have used topical creams to burn off sun damage on my arms. I have had basal cell cancer cut off my face, and had cancer frozen from my arms, shoulder, and legs. I have had squamous cell cancer removed from my nose by Moh's surgery and the skin grafted from my ear to my nose. (I can hear my food

now, ha, ha). Trust me, you do not want those 18 injections in your nose required by that procedure. I tell you this because of the melanoma I had removed from my temple this year and the 3 1/2-inch scar reminding me each day to put on the sunscreen. I tell you these things because it matters.

There are three types of skin cancer, all that I have mentioned. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) statistics from 2005 show that 54,000 people had melanoma cancer, and 8,345 people died from it that year. The largest population was Caucasian, but Hispanics, blacks, and Asians were also affected. They also say 1 in 5 people will develop skin cancer sometime during their life. Some newer statistics say 9,000 died from melanoma in 2009. As supervisors, employers, directors and foreman we should use sunscreen and preach to our employees about the importance of using it. Sunscreen comes in many forms such as lotions, creams, wipes, and sprays. Maybe sunscreen should be provided by management much as ear plugs, eye protection, and gloves are. At Stetson we use a wall mounted 2 liter refillable dispenser that I could tell you more about. Do yourself a favor, slap on the lotion and cover up with proper clothing. It may be expensive at first, but so is a plastic surgeon. ■

Please forward comments and questions to gmarshal@stetson.edu I would love to hear from you.

See more from George Marshall of Stetson University on page 38.