

Zeroharm atWork

no harm to anyone,
any time while at work

ENERGEX

Skin cancer prevention in the workplace



ENERGEX is a key energy distributor in Australia with more than 3500 staff working in a range of roles to supply electricity to a population of approximately 2.8 million people in South East Queensland.

The ENERGEX distribution area is 25,000 square kilometres with more than 50,000 kilometres of underground and overhead electricity lines and cables, more than 600,000 power poles, 43,000 transformers and almost 300,000 street lights.

Project description

ENERGEX currently has 55 per cent of personnel exposed to ultraviolet (UV) rays for at least four hours per day during their normal work activities. The nature of the work does not allow for duties to be scheduled for low UV periods and subsequently, many field personnel are exposed to these rays for six days of the working week. ENERGEX devised a program to prevent skin cancer within the workplace through:

- education
- encouragement
- enforcement.

At the outset of this program, it became apparent to ENERGEX that a number of false perceptions about sun safety existed within the workplace. An overriding consideration in initiating the skincare prevention program was the desire to ensure all of ENERGEX's people were provided with the correct information to be sun safe on the job within the broader need to foster a culture of workplace safety.

Initiatives to improve workplace health and safety

To achieve the skin cancer prevention program's objectives, ENERGEX:

- introduced a mandatory uniform to be worn at all times when outdoors, incorporating personal protective equipment in the form of long sleeved shirts, trousers or long sleeved coveralls, plus a wide brimmed hat or brims for safety helmets and terry cotton necks flaps..
- provided SPF30+ sunscreen to employees and required reapplication every two hours when exposed to sunlight.
- provided wraparound safety glasses with UV400 coated lenses to outdoor workers.
- provided online and "hard copy" information on UV exposure to assist employees and their line managers.

A concise work method statement was developed regarding climatic risk factors while working outdoors. The statement outlined ENERGEX's control methods and preventative measures that are in place.

Role of senior management

The journey of developing and implementing a skin cancer prevention program required the perceptions and behaviour of staff to be altered. This was achieved through senior and executive management supporting investment in research and implementation of the programs, and importantly, leading by example by personally adopting all UV protection practices when in the field.

ENERGEX senior management encouraged staff to participate in research projects that monitored the ongoing implementation of the skin cancer prevention program. They also supported the introduction of UV exposure content within training programs for staff.

The support of senior management allowed for:

- the necessary long term commitment to achieve best practice in skin cancer prevention
- the authority to develop and implement the change.

Outcomes and benefits

ENERGEX's skin cancer prevention program was monitored as part of regular and ongoing field audit check lists. The field audits were complemented by anecdotal field observations and UV exposure diary records which indicated:

- high level of compliance with ENERGEX's UV Protection policy
- demonstrated increase in personal UV protection practice behaviours and skin cancer knowledge, identified by two research projects conducted in partnership with QUT AusSun Research Lab
- zero work cover claims for UV exposure related conditions/injuries (October 2007 to September 2011).

How could this innovation/action help industry?

Working outdoors in Queensland can pose serious long term health risks through excessive sun and UV exposure. If you have workers exposed to the sun, strategies like these should be developed to reduce the risks to health and safety. As an added bonus, the positive personal UV protection practices and behaviour that employees use during working hours are also more likely to be adopted outside of working hours by their families, friends and the wider community.

Lessons learnt

- Behaviours can be modified through relevant/correct information being made available (education) and the application of a consistent message in the organisation (encouragement and enforcement).
- Involve the staff that the hazard/risk impacts in the planning, development, testing, and evaluation stages. This will ensure practical solutions are supported and implemented by those that the solutions affect.
- Senior management must model the desired behaviour and practices to set the right example for all staff to follow.



Case study contact

Brett Harrison

A/Contractor Operational Compliance Manager

ENERGEX

Ph: 0418 986 235

Email: brettharrison@energex.com.au

Web: www.energex.com.au

