

# MAFES Dawg Tracks

March 22, 2010

Sun Safety in the Field



Too many of us take the sun for granted! Long days of exposure to the sun, a requirement in the agriculture industry, can become a serious hazard. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S. The American Cancer Society estimates that annually one million new cases of curable basal or squamous cell will be found.

The good news is that most of these will be treated successfully. Another survey performed in recent years revealed that melanoma, the most dangerous type of skin cancer, will affect 53,000 people with 7,400 of these resulting in death. They further stated that the death rate for melanoma is increasing at three percent per year since 1981. Caucasians are 10 times more likely to contract skin cancer than nationalities with dark skin.

## SUN EXPOSURE –

Research shows that cumulative sun exposure is a major factor in developing skin cancer. Small skin changes occur each time you're exposed to the sun. Individuals with red or gray hair, blue or gray eyes and white skin are far more susceptible than those with medium or dark skin. But anyone can contract melanoma. It is not usually associated with a single sunburn, but with repeated exposure to the sun. The sun's rays are more dangerous in the summer months and during midday hours. You can get sunburn on a cloudy day in other seasons and other times during the day.

The backs of your ears, neck, face, and eyes are the most sensitive to sun exposure. Cumulative sun exposure is a major concern. If you notice a new growth, mole or discoloration, or a sudden change in an existing mole, see your doctor at your earliest convenience. Early detection of skin cancer is the first step in successful treatment. By taking precautions and avoiding the sun's rays, you can reduce your risk.

## HATS –

Protection for the face and other parts of the head can best be served by simply wearing a brimmed hat. The National Farm Medicine Center of Wisconsin found no hat to be perfect after inspecting 11 different styles. When you are considering the purchase of a new hat, consider the following items,

- **Coverage** – Much of your face, ears, eyes, and neck are covered by a hat. The baseball cap is a signature covering for all farmers, but they offer little protection to the critical areas. Wide-brimmed hats, pith helmets, hats with double brims or removable flaps will provide more protection.

Other considerations should include allowance for high humidity, strong winds, blowing dust and unexpected rain showers:

- **Comfort** - The hat has to be comfortable, must stay on when you are experiencing strong winds and should be animal friendly.
- **Commitment** - Will you wear the hat? It's no good if you don't wear it. Farmers almost always look for a wide-brim, light weight and low cost hat.

## CLOTHING –

Clothing helps to block out ultra-violet rays (UVR) of the sun when it covers the skin:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, socks.
- Special clothing won't be needed, since most of our garments are washed in detergent with fabric brighteners. These brighteners serve as UVR absorbers.
- Garments made from closely woven fabrics generally offer more sun protection.
- Dark colors generally offer good protection because they absorb more of the UVR and seal the skin from the sun's rays.

## SUNSCREEN LOTIONS –

- The body parts not covered by clothes can be protected by sunscreen lotions.
- Sunscreens are not a substitute for wearing proper clothing, but another aid.
- Sunscreens recommended for outdoor use should have a sun protection rating of at least 15. Read the label to know when and how often to apply the sunscreen and see if it waterproof.

## AVOID THE SUN –

- The easiest way to avoid the sun is to stay out of it. The "hot" times for sun are from 10 am until about 3 pm. This isn't possible in agriculture work, but when the time permits it will help to alleviate the exposure.

## SUNGLASSES –

- The best hats only block out 50 percent of the rays, so a good hat coupled with approved sunglasses is the best way to give yourself added protection. A rating on approved glasses should be as close to 100 as possible. If there is no label on the glasses, they are probably "cheapies" that don't give added protection.

Ted Gordon-Risk Mgmt. / Loss Control Mgr.  
MAFES / MSU-ES (662) 566-2201  
Excerpts: Safe Farm-IA. State Extension Service  
11/9/2009

**~AVOID THE WORST~  
PUT SAFETY FIRST!**

\* \* \* \*

**SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBIITY!!**