Construction Workers Lack Screening for Skin Cancer Despite Increased Risk

During the summer when your workers are outdoors all day in the hot sun, you’re probably worried about the risk of dehydration. While this is a major concern, your employees are facing an even bigger hazard from the sun that could ultimately be fatal.

Construction laborers, whose work keeps them outside for extended periods of time, are at high risk for skin cancer. However, because there are so many other risks to their health and safety that are more immediate, the dangers of skin cancer have often been overlooked.

The severity of the problem was recently documented by Dr. Robert Kirsner at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, in a study titled Reported Skin Cancer Screening of U.S. Adult Workers. Kirsner and his fellow researchers used the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data from 2000 and 2005 to estimate the percentage of:

- Workers who received a skin exam during a routine appointment with a primary health care provider within the past 12 months
- Workers who had a skin exam in their lifetimes

After studying the data for 38,124 workers included in the survey during that time frame, the researchers concluded that only 15 percent of the workers said that they had undergone a skin examination during their lifetime. In addition, only 8 percent of those who had seen a health care provider in the past 12 months responded that they had received a skin exam during their visit. As a result of these statistics, Kirsner and his colleagues emphasized that all patients, regardless of their occupations, should ask their physician to provide skin exams during routine check ups.

It is important that you encourage your employees to get regular skin examinations. However, there are also some other proactive steps you can take to help your employees protect themselves from the dangers of excessive sun exposure:

- Provide a tent or a canopied area where employees can take breaks and eat their lunch away from the sun’s rays.
- Minimize outdoor work from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. when the sun’s rays are the most intense. If your employees must work outdoors during these hours, schedule frequent rest breaks so that they can come inside away from the sun.
- Make it mandatory for all employees working outdoors to wear protective clothing, wide-brimmed hats, sunglasses, sunscreens, and lip screens. Both the sunscreen and the lip screen should be SPF 15 or higher, waterproof, and protect against UVA and UVB radiation. Insist that employees carry their sunscreen and lip screen with them, so they can reapply every 2 hours.

Your employees can also log on to the American Academy of Dermatology’s web site (http://www.melanomamonday.org/) to find out how they can perform a skin cancer self examination, and to see if there are free skin cancer screening centers in their area.