

Forest Industry Safety Alert

Silviculture worker loses part of ear to skin cancer

Location: BC Interior **Date:** Long-term exposure

Details of the Incident: A silviculture worker was diagnosed with skin cancer, and part of his ear was removed. See personal story to the right.

Silviculture workers, including tree planters, spend long periods of time outside in the sun at the hottest time of year. Prolonged UV Exposure is recognized as causal to skin cancer. Worker should know there are different types of skin cancer, including **Basal Skin Cancer** and potentially fatal **Squamous Cell Skin Cancer** that are most frequently found on sun exposed skin such as face, neck, and hands. **Malignant Melanoma** is less common than other skin cancers, but growing in frequency, more dangerous, and potentially fatal unless detected and treated at an early stage. People can have different levels of vulnerability to skin cancers, based on their skin tone, family history, and the state of their immune system.

Recommended Preventive Action(s):

- Employers should educate workers about skin cancer, and the factors that can increase personal risk.
- Workers should cover skin with high SPF sunscreen, wide brimmed hats, and clothing with a high SPF.
- Working with no shirt on for long periods should be strongly discouraged.
- Workers with unusual lumps or growths should immediately consult a physician.
- Extra care should be taken during summer days of peak exposure, including days of light overcast.
- Workers should be encouraged to check their skin frequently and ask for help in checking hard to see areas such as back and neck.

Colin's Story

I just wanted to remind all the planters out there to wear sunscreen and/or cover up this season. A few months ago, I discovered a mole behind my ear and it turned out to be melanoma. This is the deadliest form of skin cancer and it WILL kill you if you don't catch it in time.

I just had a huge chunk taken out of the back of my ear today and am hoping it hasn't progressed any further from the highly curable "stage 0" that I originally caught it at. I used to be an idiot and planted shirtless or hatless my first few years. Learn from my younger idiocy and cover up and wear sunscreen this season... and reapply. Ask anyone who's planted with me in the last year or two... I look like a complete dork when I'm out there. Be dorky. It's cooler than getting your ear chopped off. Or dying.

Remember that we work outside all day every day in the summer. We are more susceptible to skin cancer than the rest of the population. So check your moles. Check your friends' moles. And visit a doctor if you're worried about one... DO NOT just brush it off.

Submitted by Jordan Tesluk, BC Safe Forestry Program, Thanks to Colin Pickle
Further information available through Canadian Dermatology Association