

## Is this the wrong kind of sunshine? Employers may well ask

By Rosie Murray-West, City Correspondent (Filed: 22/06/2005)

An EU directive that could force bosses to make daily risk assessments about the strength of the sun is being debated this week in the European Parliament.

If it is passed, all employers with staff working outdoors would need to look every day at the levels of radiation to which their employees could be exposed and devise an action plan to minimise health risks.

The directive, which applies to all forms of optical radiation, is designed to control workers' exposure to ultraviolet light, visible and infrared radiation, and lasers. The Forum of Private Business said yesterday that the proposed directive was "unworkable and absurd", especially for smaller employers.

"Most businesses have neither the resources, nor, more importantly, the expertise to undertake such scientific analysis," said chief executive Nick Goulding.

"Worryingly, it could also open a legal can of worms for employers by creating uncertainty about legal liability in cases of diseases caused by exposure to natural sources of radiation.

"Unless the directive is amended and natural sources of radiation, like sunlight, are removed from its scope, it will be impossible for small businesses to comply with its provisions." The forum is calling on the European Parliament to remove natural sources of radiation from the scope of the directive.

The UK's Health and Safety Executive said yesterday that exposure to the sun should be an issue for all employers of outdoor workers. It has produced a leaflet that advises employers to tell their staff to keep their tops on, wear a hat, drink plenty of water and check their skin regularly for moles.

A spokesman for Royal Mail, which employs around 100,000 outdoor workers on postal rounds said yesterday that, while it makes no specific UV risk assessments, it does issue employees with advice about the sun.

"We tell them to cover up, especially if they have fair skin," he said. "Many postmen and women wear shorts, but lightweight long trousers are available".

He added that, although Royal Mail does not provide sunscreen for employees, they are offered a cap. "It's not the traditional peaked cap," he said. "It's more of a baseball cap thing."



Take cover: employers could be obliged to devise an action plan for those who work outside