

# The California Merchant

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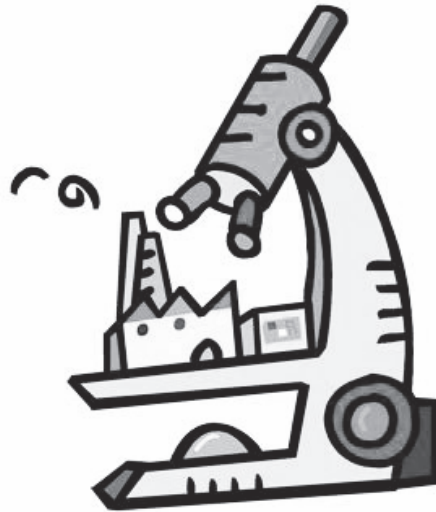
## Give your business a check-up

Getting an annual medical check-up is a good way for us to stay healthy. Your business should also get a checkup every year to make sure you're on the right track. With all the recent changes we've had, it's a great time to start thinking about the health of your business. Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

What's the bottom line compared with last year at this time? If you matched last year's sales, you haven't grown. If you account for inflation, you've actually sustained a loss. That's not good. Check your competition, how have they fared? Figure out what they are doing better and rather than trying to compete with them, find an alternative plus that your company offers and expand on that. Consider upping your advertising budget. Too many people make the mistake of looking at advertising as an expense rather than an investment. You could join a service club. It's a way to do some good, and at the same time promote your business.

How much of your business is from repeat customers? This is important because experts estimate the cost of getting new customers versus retaining existing ones can be as much as five to one in terms of dollars spent on advertising. Therefore keeping current customers is more cost-effective than enticing new ones. A happy customer will tell their friends, and their friends will tell friends, and on it goes.

Do you give your regular customers better service than one-timers? If your customers feel a connection with you they will return. Have a customer appreciation day, or a special invitation-



only sale. Learn a little about them and remember it so you can start a conversation. The personal touch goes a long way in keeping the relationship going.

Have you recently introduced a new product or line of service? It's important for your customers to see that you are willing to try to grow and change with the times. No one likes to be stuck in a rut and your customers probably have good ideas as to what they would like from you. Don't be afraid to ask them how to improve your business. They will be impressed with your willingness to accommodate them.

Do you have happy employees? The quickest way to bring a business down is to have grumpy workers. Observe your group and see how they interact with each other and with your customers. If you suspect someone is unhappy, consult with him or her and find out why. Keep your employees happy by dealing with them evenhandedly and sharing your successes.

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**... and more**

## Oh no! It's audit season. What should you do?

**T**he IRS gave taxpayers an extra month this year to file their taxes without penalty. But May 15 is almost upon us, and the past year has brought out all kinds of tax hurdles and conundrums due to remote work and other factors.

Now that your taxes are done and you're breathing a sigh of relief, do you know what you should do if you get the dreaded letter from the IRS saying they would like to audit your return?

The chances of an audit are slim if you've filed careful returns, but the self-employed continue to be a vulnerable group.

There are a few things you can do to help yourself receive a favorable outcome if the IRS questions your return.

Hire an experienced tax attorney.

The IRS looks at this as a sign of good faith to resolve the situation.

Hire an "EA." That's an Enrolled Agent. These are people who have either passed a written test or worked for the IRS for more than five years. They are then able to negotiate on your behalf with the IRS.

Always file your tax return. It is a crime to fail to file the return when taxes are owed. It is not a crime to file your taxes and not pay them. Once the return is filed, you will need to work out a payment schedule with the IRS.

Don't file for bankruptcy unless your back taxes are more than three years delinquent. If they are less than three years delinquent, bankruptcy will not apply and may even add penalties and interest.

If you are an employer, always pay your payroll taxes. The IRS takes this very seriously. Failure to do this results in penalties plus interest that is very steep and there is no relief; not even in bankruptcy.

Don't fall for television and Internet ads that promise to instantly end your tax troubles. These businesses are out to make money for themselves and not represent you. All too frequently they take information and tell you they will settle with the IRS for cents on the dollar and then sell that information to other leads and never even contact the IRS on your behalf.

If you do have to settle with the IRS and they place a tax lien on you, once you have paid your settlement, the IRS is generally required to remove all liens within 30 days. Make sure that happens.

## Grow your knowledge around asbestos

**W**orkers in many industries, including automotive and home repair, should be aware of possible asbestos-causing health risks and know how to protect themselves from damaging exposure levels. Asbestos exposure can occur in any home or building built before the 1980s, so office workers and those who work from home can also be affected.

### What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring minerals manufactured into products used because of their high tensile strength, flexibility, and resistance to heat and chemicals. Among other products, asbestos can be found in vehicle brakes, gas-kets and clutches, as well as in old floor tiles, siding, insulation, and roof shingles.

### What are the health risks of asbestos?

To be a significant health concern, asbestos fibers must be inhaled over an extended period of time and accumulate in the lungs. Inhaled asbestos fibers can cause serious diseases to the lungs and other organs that may not appear until years after exposure. As exposure increases, the risk of asbestos-related diseases also increases.

### Where is do you find asbestos?

In the early 1970s, the federal government declared a moratorium on asbestos production. However, the production of certain asbestos-containing products continued into the early 1980s.

### How can you protect against asbestos exposure?

The best way to protect

against asbestos exposure is to avoid work practice that allows fibers or dusts to be generated and become airborne. When a job will involve possible exposure, recommended personal protective equipment, which may include appropriate respirators, should be used. Worker training in asbestos hazards and in the proper selection, fitting, use, storage, and maintenance of protective devices is essential.

Preventing or controlling asbestos exposures can be done with engineering controls (such as enclosures to isolate the source, using ventilation systems, employing low pressure/wet cleaning methods and having HEPA vacuum systems), administrative actions (limiting worker exposure time and providing changing rooms/showering facilities), and personal protective equipment (providing

overalls, goggles, respirators, etc.). An OSHA-defined "competent person" should conduct required monitoring and employers must maintain records of the monitoring and of worker asbestos-related training.

Although employers have a legal responsibility to provide and maintain a safe working environment, including job training, safety equipment, and supervision, it's the workers' responsibility of to follow all safety procedures and use the protective equipment provided, so as not to place themselves and others in the workplace at risk. For more detailed information on asbestos, visit the website maintained by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration at <http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/asbestos>.

# Protect workers from sun damage this summer

By Dr. James Fairfield

Sun damage ages your skin, and can leave it vulnerable to skin cancers. Sunscreen offers effective skin protection—if it's the right sunscreen, used properly. What most people think is adequate sun protection usually isn't. Here are tips to avoid the aging effects of sun damage.

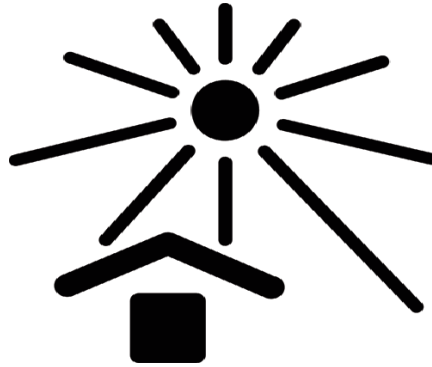
It's one of the most frequent questions I get. Patients ask me all the time: Do I really need to wear sunscreen? And the answer is, "Yes, no matter who you are, where you live, where you work, you really need to wear sunscreen every day." Why am I so determined to get everybody slathered with skin protection? Well, nobody is in a better position than a dermatologist to see the harsh effects of solar radiation on human skin.

Most people know that exposure to the ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun can lead to skin cancer, especially in fair-skinned people with light eye and hair color. But it's not only pale folks who are at risk: multiple sunburns, for any skin color or type, raise the risk of skin cancer. And sunscreen really can effectively prevent sunburn, if you use it right.

Short of cancer, though, years of sun exposure gradually change our skin in ways that make us look—well, old. Yes, sunlight can promote premature aging of the skin, accelerating natural aging processes, weakening collagen, and causing the elastic fibers in skin to uncoil like a worn-out bedspring. And then, you know the rest. Your skin sags. Gravity takes over, the skin can't hold out, so down it comes.

Sun exposure also dries out skin and reduces its ability to hold moisture. The resulting lines and wrinkles sharpen the appearance of aging. And the cute, charming freckles that the sun brings out in childhood morph into the brown spots and discoloration that plague us as we get older.

So how can we use sunscreen to get



the skin protection we need? First, be sure you get the right product. The worst sun damage comes from UVA rays. UVA has a longer wavelength, so it can penetrate deeper into the skin, causing the aging effects we associate with sun exposure. We now know that UVA exposure also blocks your skin's natural repair mechanisms, so that previous damage and pre-cancers cannot be reversed. It's UVA radiation that can give you a sunburn on a cloudy day—it travels right through the clouds. And it can go through the glass of your car windows, which is why we dermatologists see the most skin cancers on the head and neck, on the left. Look at the left side of your neck. Do you see brown spots? When you were 13, they didn't have UVA protection. That's the ray that's aging you.

So I always urge my patients to make sure they have the right product, and to use it correctly. First, look for a bottle or tube of sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays (UVB is the one that causes burning between 10 am and 3 pm). More tips for effective sunscreen use:

- Be sure you get a sunscreen with an SPF number of at least 30
- Apply it liberally, about 15 to 20 minutes before sun exposure
- Reapply every one to two hours, especially if you're going into the water or perspiring a lot

Once you have the sunscreen part down, there's more you can do to protect yourself from the sun:

- Limit your sun exposure, especially during the high sun hours of 10 am to 3

pm.

- Seek shade can whenever possible. If possible, set up an umbrella or sun canopy where outdoor work is performed. Shade doesn't negate the need for sunscreen, but allows sunscreen to work longer and better, and lessens the amount of UVA and UVB radiation being soaked up by the skin. It has the added benefit of cooling workers down, lessening the danger of heat injury.

- Find sun protective clothing – it offers effective protection while you're outdoors. Luckily, clothing with high SPF is readily available these days.

Did you know you can get sunburned even under your clothes? Normal clothing does not protect fully against the sun's rays, and can lead to sun damage on skin in areas like shoulders, hidden under a t-shirt or work shirt. For people who will be outside for long periods of time, sun protective clothing is a good choice. Sun protective clothing features fabric with tighter weaves than normal clothing, which reduces the amount of UVB and UVA rays that can penetrate to your skin. Some brands may also use technology to reflect rays away from skin.

Brands like Coolibar, Solbari, and Solumbra, as well as protective clothing made by outdoor companies like Columbia and REI, offer breathable, wicking protection that may not only keep skin safe from sun damage, but help workers stay cool and comfortable on hot days. When buying sun protective clothing, look for the SPF on the label. It should be UPF 50 or above.

Another benefit of wearing sun protective clothing is it lessens the need for sunscreen and provides reliable protection all day. It also protects areas where it's hard to apply sunscreen, like on the back.

A good sun hat is very important for sun protection. The delicate skin of the scalp is hard to cover with sunscreen,

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# Water! It's a precious resource... use it wisely

As California enters into a record-breaking drought year, it's more important than ever to make sure we are all doing our part to conserve this natural resource. Luckily, there are many ways to make our offices, homes, and landscapes earth-friendly.

Americans use a lot of water. Some experts estimate that the average U.S. resident uses about 70 gallons of water; 280 gallons per day per family of four. At that rate, a typical neighborhood is using an Olympic sized swimming pool of water every day, just to brush their teeth, shower, cook, and flush the toilet! When you imagine how many neighborhoods there are in your city, each drawing that amount of water, it's easy to visualize the strain this puts on your local water supply.

Here are a few tips for how you can do your part to a little less water around your house and leave it a little more of it in your local lake or river for the benefit of nature and wildlife.

## Check for Leaks

The worst way to use more water than you need to is to waste it. When your pipes leak, when your sink drips, and when you toilet runs, that's water and money going down the drain with literally nothing to show for it.

Here's a quick and easy way to see if you have any leaky plumbing in your home. You can involve the kids. They'll have fun playing "leak detective."

First, find your water meter. It's probably on the corner of the house closest to the street. At the start of the test, check the meter and write down the number of gallons you have used. Then, go 30 minutes without using any water. Don't flush the toilet. Don't brush your teeth. Don't take a shower. Don't wash your hands. If this second step is hard, think of it as a reminder how important water is.

After 30 minutes has passed, return to the meter and read the numbers again.



Where are the numbers now? If they haven't changed, no leaks. If they have changed, now it's time to play leak detective—where are the leaks? Start by going around the house and turning off the water to all the toilets. Then wait another 30 minutes. If the numbers don't budget this time, then you have found your culprit—a leaky toilet.

If the water numbers still go up after you shut off water to the toilets, then it's probably time to call a plumber, or your local water district: some may offer free leak detection or water saving services to help you pinpoint where the problem lies.

## Install new fixtures, or fix the old ones with an aerator

Once you've found and fixed those pesky leaks, you can turn your attention to the fixtures that just use more water than they need to get the job done. You've probably been thinking about remodeling that bathroom or kitchen anyway, haven't you?

When buying a new fixture, look for EPA's new WaterSense label on the showerheads and faucets. Buy these with confidence that they will provide you with a comfortable, luxurious shower – without squandering life's most precious resource. The little savings each day add up to something important. By switching to an EPA WaterSense showerhead, a household with children can save an average of 2,300 gallons of water per year.

Three quarters of all indoor water usage is in the bathroom. Low flow shower heads can help reduce that amount. Low flow shower heads are a great way to limit the water flow from your shower head. They deliver less gallons per minute (gpm) of water than conventional shower heads. The amount of water delivered from a shower head depends upon the gpm and the pounds per square inch (psi). The standard water pressure level in homes is 80 psi. This is a high pressure level and delivers a large amount of water through a shower head. Low flow shower heads help by decreasing the amount of water, while remaining at the same water pressure level. Conventional showerheads deliver 5-8 gallons per minute. Low flow showerheads deliver about 2.5 gpm. There are some new low flow showerheads on the market which deliver as low as 1.5 gpm. If you are not a seasoned DIY'er, then you may want to have a professional plumber install it for you.

## Sink Aerators

Faucet aerators look like tiny screens and come installed with most faucets. Faucet aerators decrease the amount of water flowing out from the faucet and can be installed in kitchen and bathroom faucets. Without an aerator, the water comes out in a gushing-type flow. An aerator spreads the flow, which saves water. Not all faucets are installed with water-saving aerators. A water saving aerator is rated 2.75 gpm. The rated flow should be imprinted on the side of the faucet. Faucet aerators are simple to install and cost about \$10.

## Install a new toilet

Forget what you think you know about water efficient toilets. Toilets that carry the EPA WaterSense label work great AND use less water than the older models. In fact, by replacing an older toilet with a new WaterSense toilet, your family can shave almost 5% off

# Are you dead on the job?

By Bob Selden

There's a story from a few years back about a worker who was dead at his desk for five days before anyone discovered him: "Bosses of a publishing firm are trying to work out why no one noticed that one of their employees had been sitting dead at his desk for five days before anyone asked if he was feeling okay."

George Turklebaum, 51, who had been employed as a proofreader at a New York firm for 30 years, had a heart attack in the open-plan office he shared with 23 other workers. He quietly passed away on Monday, but nobody noticed until Saturday morning when an office cleaner asked why he was still working during the weekend.

His boss Elliot Wachinski said: 'George was always the first guy in each morning and the last to leave at night, so no one found it unusual that he was in the same position all that time and didn't say anything. He was always absorbed in his work and kept much to himself.'

A post mortem examination revealed that he had been dead for five days after suffering a coronary. Ironically, George was proofreading manuscripts of medical textbooks when he died."

True or not, there is an important message in this yarn. Have you been appreciated at work lately? While pondering this question, keep in mind that appreciation is a two way street—we also need to appreciate the work of others.

We all want to be associated with a winner, be it a winning person, a winning team, a worthwhile cause or a successful organization. We all have sports people, teams, actors or artists that we consider "ours." When they do well, we bask in their reflected glory. It's the same at work: We want to be associated with a worthwhile, winning organization. Our greatest reward is receiving acknowledgment that we have contributed to making something meaningful happen. More than anything else, people want to be valued for a job well done by those they hold in high regard.

A famous study by Lawrence Lindahl in the 1940s came up with some surprising results. When supervisors and their

employees were asked to list "What motivates the employees?"

- Employees listed "appreciation of a job well done" as number one and "feeling in on things" as number two.

- Supervisors, on the other hand, expected the employees would rank these two items as eighth and tenth respectively (supervisors thought employees would put "wages" as number one and "promotion" number two).

These results were replicated in similar studies in the 1980s and again in the 1990s. In another recent study, employees were asked to rank job-based incentives: "personal thank-you's" came first and "a note of appreciation from my manager" came second. "Money" came in at 16th!

**Praise, the thing that motivates us the most, takes so little time and costs nothing. Famous management writer Rosabeth Moss Kantor once said "Compensation is a right. Recognition is a gift."**

Have you appreciated the work of others lately? Has the value of your own work been appreciated? Here's a quick test - over the last week, have you:

- Told someone they have done a good job?

- Looked specifically to find someone doing something well?

- Made someone else look good rather than taking the credit yourself?

- Thanked others for your own success?

- Passed on positive comments you have heard about others?

These are simple examples of the things we need to do regularly to acknowledge the good work of others.

You might say, "If it's that easy, why don't more people do it?" There are many reasons, but they all fall into two categories—personal and organizational.

On a personal level, many of us are not comfortable giving praise. We may be awkward about it, or perhaps believe that people are paid to do a job, so why do we have to praise them?

From an organisational perspective, it may be the culture that is holding us

back, or perhaps technology preventing us from valuing the work of others. For example, technology has changed the way many of us operate. Email may have replaced personal interaction, so we no longer see what others do well - out of sight is out of mind, so how can we praise good work if we don't see it?

Here are six ways we can put praise for a job well done back into our working lives.

1. Look for things people do well and acknowledge them for their good work.

2. Be a model of acknowledgment - show others it's OK to give praise.

3. Have a conversation with a colleague about how to give praise for work well done.

4. When people have performed above the norm, write them a small thank you note (not email).

5. Encourage others to thank one another and pass on stories of good work to your manager.

6. Work to create a culture of appreciation - make acknowledgment part of your daily routine.

The essential point is that praise must be frequent and given locally (by colleagues and managers). It should not be seen as a corporate initiative or program, but merely "the way we do things around here."

Also, praise must be genuine. People are very good at spotting insincerity. When you do praise someone, make sure it's for the good work they have done and not just for the sake of it.

So, find someone doing something good today and simply tell them what a good job they've done. Above all, tap people on the shoulder occasionally to make sure they are still alive.

*Bob Selden is the author of "What To Do When You Become The Boss," a self help book for new managers.*

# Water: Don't let it go down the drain

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your total water use (and bill) per year. Toilet flushing is the largest single source of indoor water use, accounting for about 30 percent of water used inside the home. Upgrade to an efficient toilet for substantial savings. Also, consider the old saying: "If it's yellow, let it mellow. If it's brown, flush it down." If you're working at home all day, or alone in the office, try flushing a bit less often if it's only urine.

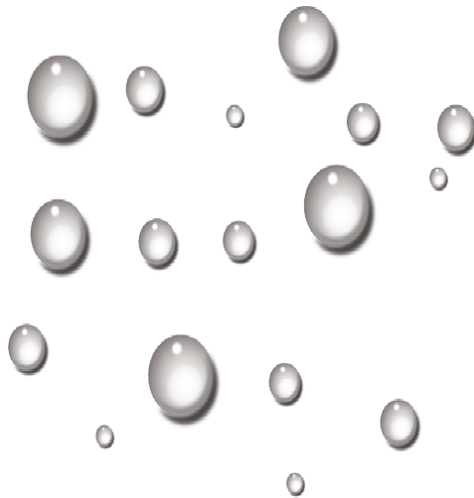
## Other indoor water tips

Treat water like the precious substance it is. Turn off the tap while shaving, brushing teeth, and washing dishes. Oh, and you know how you're supposed to lather your hands for 20 seconds while washing them? Turn off the water while you wash! 20 seconds of water going down the drain can be as much as a gallon, and considering the amount of hand-washing we're all doing these days, it can really add up.

Upgrade to newer water-saving clothes washers and dishwashers, saving up to 25 gallons of water per load. Already have efficient models? Only operate them with full loads.

Install a water recirculation pump. These small devices, usually attached to the hot water line at one of your sinks or another output (and often tucked out of sight in your under-sink cabinet) are genius for saving water. With the press of a button or with a motion sensor, the pump circulates your water until it gets warm; when it shuts off, you turn on the water and get it hot in your shower or kitchen sink right away, saving all that cold water from going down the drain.

If a pump is not in the cards for you, try a low-tech, but perfectly useful bucket method. Put a 10-gallon bucket in your shower or a smaller one in your sink. Run the cold water into it while waiting for it to heat up. Use that water for landscaping, watering indoor plants, washing dishes, or put it into your toilet tank.



The bucket method can also be used for graywater recycling while handwashing or rinsing dishes. A dish pan or bucket in your kitchen sink can catch your wastewater from washing hands or dishes, rinsing out a dishcloth, etc. This water can then be reused in the garden or on your lawn. Make sure, if you're using graywater in your landscape, to use an eco-friendly dish detergent. Some graywater-friendly brands include Oasis, BioPac, Biokleen, Seventh Generation, and Dr. Bronner's pure castile soap (Dr. Bronner's is also safe for laundry, hand-washing, and as a body soap, if you want to catch your extra shower water for reuse!

## Outdoor water use

The Marin County Municipal Water District offers these tips for saving water in your yard and landscaping:

Don't overwater. Overwatering is the #1 cause of plant problems and wastes precious water resources. Symptoms of overwatering include algae, moss and mushroom growth; yellow lower leaves that fall off; and wilted young shoots. Try cutting back your watering times two minutes for every ten you normally water.

Irrigate efficiently. Upgrade to drip irrigation or improve the efficiency of your current sprinklers by changing them to high-efficiency rotor-type nozzles.

Get smart. Replace your standard controller with a smart irrigation controller.

If it's broken, fix it. Inspect your irrigation system for leaks, pipe breaks, and clogged or missing emitters and repair if necessary. This summer, water districts including Marin's will begin issuing violations for egregious irrigation leaks, so fix those broken sprinklers pronto!

Add a shut-off nozzle on your garden hose and save about 5 - 7 gallons per minute.

Water while you sleep. Water early in the morning, or during the night, so less is lost to evaporation. Water conservation regulations prohibit irrigation between the hours of 9 a.m. - 7 p.m., except for system testing and repair.

Mulch, mulch, mulch. A 3-inch layer of mulch throughout your planting beds reduces water loss from evaporation and helps keep down water-hogging weeds.

Only water plants. Adjust sprinkler heads so they don't water the pavement. Sweep sidewalks and driveways clean instead of using the hose.

Choose climate-appropriate plants and consider reducing the size of your thirsty lawn. Many water districts, including Marin's, offer resources and rebates for converting lawn to water-efficient landscaping.

Sweep driveways and patios instead of hosing them down. Invest in a hardy broom and sweep dust and debris from your walkways and patios. Avoid power-washing patio furniture, concrete, and decks, if possible.

Lastly, keep that car a little dirty... or utilize a local carwash facility! Car washes are much more efficient than home washing. Look for one advertising a green or water-saving service.

**For more resources, as well as 100 ways to conserve our most precious natural resource, visit [wateruseitwisely.com](http://wateruseitwisely.com).**



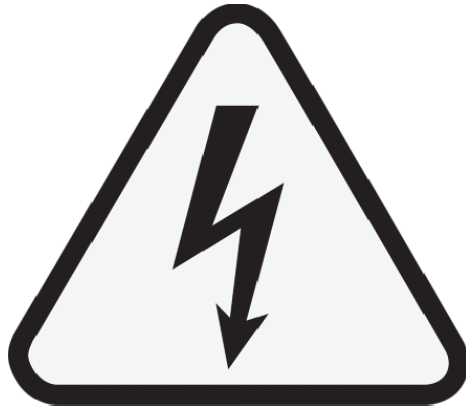
# SAFETY ... IT PAYS



## Ground electrical equipment safely

**E**lectricity is an essential source of energy for many construction-related operations. However, fewer sources have a greater potential to cause harm than electricity. Working safely with electricity is possible if you're trained in, understand, and follow certain basic ground rules.

By its nature, electricity will take the path of least resistance to the ground. If your body happens to be in the way of that path, even a small amount of electric current can kill you. The risk of shock or electrocution is greatest around metal objects or in damp conditions. If you'll be working in such conditions, recognize the hazards and take all necessary precautions. Precautions include wearing personal protective equipment such as rubber gloves and rubber-soled shoes, using insulated tools, putting rubber mats over damp areas, and covering exposed metal with rubber sheets.



Additionally, make sure all electric equipment, switch enclosures, and conduit systems are properly grounded and that all external or damp operations are wired for wet conditions.

Water and electricity can be a fatal combination so winter can be an espe-

cially dangerous season for working with electric tools and equipment. Damp areas and metal objects act as conductors for electric currents. If the floor is wet or if someone is doing electrical work while standing in a puddle of water, the moisture will allow more current to pass through the person's body. So, be aware of the electric components around you and if you're holding or touching an electrified object, watch where you're stepping.

Treat every electric wire as if it were a live one. Stop using a tool or piece of equipment whenever a slight shock or tingling is felt. Turn off the electric power if the smell of hot or burning substance is detected or if smoke, sparks or flickering lights are noticed. And, whenever working with energized equipment, always follow all lockout and tagout procedures.

Contact with overhead power supply lines can also kill. Workers using high clearance devices should continually be aware of the dangers and take sensible precautions to avoid contact with overhead lines. If an overhead line breaks, keep away from the wire and everything it touches, then call the local electric company to shut off the main power. Only qualified electricians should repair electrical equipment or work on energized lines.

For those who'll be working on or around energized electrical tools and equipment, it's a good idea to be trained in emergency response and CPR procedures. Finally, phone numbers of the local power company and the nearest emergency response facilities should be prominently posted and readily accessible at all times in the event that an electrical-related incident does occur.

## OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/PubOrder.asp>



## Sun: Get new sunscreen every year

Continued from page 3

and is among the top places on the body skin cancer may appear. A good sun hat will also shade the face and neck, will work all day without being washed away by sweat, and will keep a worker cooler than no hat.

- Throw away your sunscreen from last year and purchase new products.

That last point needs some extra emphasis. Most people don't realize that these old sunscreens chemically break down. Unless there's an expiration date on the bottle, you can't assume they'll provide the label's SPF protection for more than a year.

For the take-home message, in case you skipped to the end: Use sun protection that blocks both UVA and UVB to their exposed skin each and every day. Seek out or create shade when possible. Look into sun protective clothing. And,

finally, wear a hat! Your skin will thank you by staying healthy and beautiful for years to come.

*James C. Fairfield, MD has established the oldest and most respected dermatology practice in the Delaware Valley. For more free cosmetic dermatology information and resources and to sign up for his free report, Erase the Years; visit his web site at [www.cmderm.com](http://www.cmderm.com).*

## The new ergonomics: Good health through inconvenience

By June Campbell

**Y**ou spend your day at a computer workstation or executive desk. The furniture item fills up the corner of the room, holds your computer, scanner, filing basket and a year's worth of office supplies. There's enough space left over to spread out a picnic lunch if you are so inclined. You settle comfortably into a big executive type chair on casters and get ready to call a few colleagues in for a meeting. As you wait, you talk into a telephone receiver that you're squeezing in place by crunching your shoulder up towards your ear.

That scene is SO nineties, workplace experts tell us. The trend of the new century is towards office furnishings and office equipment that encourage mobility. Get rid of all that big, expensive office furniture before it kills you, they say. Replace it with a smaller "just big enough"

desk and equipment that encourages you to move around as you do your job.

In other words, get rid of all that "convenience." Force yourself into healthy action by making your environment inconvenient.

In the first years of this new century, the health hazards associated with a desk job have moved beyond conditions like repetitive strain disorder and carpal tunnel syndrome. Not that we can forget about those conditions, but there's more to worry about now.

E-thrombosis is a newly-recognized condition that afflicts people who sit still for extended lengths of time. And, sitting still for extended periods of time in the workplace is usually associated with computer use.

E-thrombosis (medical terminology is Deep Vein Thrombosis or DVT) is simi-

lar to the condition suffered by long distance air travelers. It's no laughing matter. E-thrombosis can be life-threatening. A blood clot forms in the legs due to long hours of inactivity. The clot can break off and move into the lungs with sometimes fatal results. Although only one case has been diagnosed at this time, researchers believe that e-thrombosis may have contributed to many cases of pulmonary embolisms, but gone unnoticed.

Sitting still for hours on end leaves us vulnerable to this and possibly other health hazards. And, according to physiotherapists, working out at the end of the day isn't the solution. By that time, the damage has been done and the workout could do more damage. Prevention is not difficult. All that is required is that you move about regularly throughout the day.

Get a desk that's just-big-enough, or an e-work station

with movable modules. Put that file cabinet in one corner of the room and the copier in another. Provide yourself with articulated arm rests for computer use. Get both an adjustable chair and a fitness stool. Switch back and forth between the two, and at intervals throughout the day, sit on a fitness ball instead of the chair or stool. Sitting on the ball forces good posture and strengthens core muscles.

Even better, get a stand-up desk, so you can switch from sitting to standing while you do all your desk tasks. Walking around only five to ten minutes each hour is all it takes.

In short, get moving! It's good for you.

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