Physical Agent Data Sheet (PADS)

Ultraviolet Radiation

Description

Ultraviolet (UV) is the name for a band of energy on the electromagnetic spectrum that lies between visible light and x-rays. UV has some of the properties of visible light and other properties of the x-rays. Like visible light, some UV is actually visible but most is invisible like x-rays. UV, like light, cannot penetrate very far into most solids. Some UV, like x-rays, can ionize atoms or molecules which visible light cannot do.

Common sources of UV include the sun (especially when reflected by water, snow or ice), sun tanning lamps, mercury discharge lamps, welding arcs, plasma torches, and some lasers.

Health Hazards

The nature and seriousness of UV injuries depend on the length of exposure, the intensity of the UV, the type or wavelength of UV, the sensitivity of the individual, and the presence of certain chemicals (photosensitizers).

Skin

UV from the sun causes sunburns and skin cancer. UV from other sources can also cause skin burns varying in degree from mild reddening of the skin (first degree burns) to more severe and painful blistering (second degree burns). Long-term skin exposure to UV can cause actinic skin (a dry, brown, inelastic wrinkled skin) and skin cancer. Fair skinned individuals are more likely to develop both sunburns and skin cancer.

Some drugs, such as the antibiotic tetracycline, can cause skin burns from UV to happen faster and to be more severe. Products containing coal tar can also cause this reaction. These substances are called photosensitizers.

UV exposure may trigger cold sores (Herpes Simplex) in some individuals.

Eyes

When UV is absorbed by the eyes and eyelids, it can cause keratoconjunctivitis or "welders' flash." This is a very painful condition that feels like grit in the eyes and may make the eyes water and very sensitive to light. The condition usually occurs 6-12 hours after exposure and may last 6-24 hours. The painful injury may make a person unwilling or unable to open his/her eyes during this time period, but most discomfort is gone within 48 hours with no lasting injury. The maximum sensitivity of the eye occurs at a UV wavelength of 270 manometers. Cataracts or clouding of the lens of the eye can occur during high exposures to wavelengths in the range of 295-300 nanometers.

Skin Safety and Health Precautions

Skin burns from high, short-term exposure to UV and skin cancer from long-term exposure can be prevented by covering exposed skin with clothing and protective equipment such as gloves and face shields.* Barrier creams or lotions with sun protection factors (SPF) of 15-18 will also help prevent skin burns.

* Welders' helmets should provide protection for the neck area as well as the face and eyes.

Eyes

Tinted goggles and/or face shields should be worn to prevent burns of the cornea and eyelids. Selection of the appropriate degree of tint should be based on the anticipated wavelength and intensity of the UV source. (see Table 1)

Table 1
Shade No. 3.0: is for glare of reflected sunlight from snow, water, sand, etc.; stray light from cutting and welding, metal pouring and work around furnaces and foundries; and soldering (for goggles or spectacles with side shields worn under helmets in arc welding operations, particularly gas-shielded arc welding operations).
Shade Nos. 4.0 and 5.0: are for light acetylene cutting and welding; light electric spot welding.
Shade Nos. 6.0 and 7.0: are for gas cutting, medium gas welding, and non-gas-shielded arc welding using current values up to 30 amperes.
Shade Nos. 8.0 and 9.0: are for heavy gas cutting and nongas-shielded arc welding and cutting using current values from 30 to 75 amperes.
Shade Nos. 10.0 and 11.0: are for arc welding and cutting using current values from 75 to 200 amperes.
Shade Nos. 12.0 and 13.0: are for arc welding and cutting using current values from 200 to 400 amperes.
Shade No. 14.0: is for arc welding and cutting using current values over 400 amperes (including carbon arc welding and cutting), and for atomic hydrogen welding.
NOTE: ordinary window glass, 1/811 in thickness, is sufficient protection for the eyes and skin against the ultraviolet radiation from ordinary sources such as sunlight. In cases of extremely intense sources of ultraviolet and visible radiation, it is not adequate.

In sunny conditions on water, snow and ice, extra precautions should be taken to protect against reflected sunlight. Sunglasses with side shields should be worn. When applying protective ointments or lotions, special attention should be paid to the nose, lips, underside of the chin, and tops of the ears.

In workplaces, operations such as welding which produce high levels of UV should be performed behind enclosures or barriers to absorb the radiation and shield nearby workers.

UV sources like mercury discharge lamps should be operated only with all safety devices in place and in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

First Aid Procedures

Skin burns: immediate application of cold (cold water, ice, cold clean cloths) to the affected area will reduce the severity and relieve pain associated with first and second degree burns. Do not apply any burn ointments, creams, or butter to skin burns.

Eyes: place sterile dressings over the eyes of a person suffering from UV burns of the eyes and seek medical attention.

Recommended Exposure Limits[2]

The following section is very technical and is included for the use of safety and health professionals who have the skills and equipment to measure UV levels.

These threshold limit values (TLVS) refer to ultraviolet radiation in the spectral region between 200 and 400 nm and represent conditions under which it is believed that nearly all workers may be repeatedly exposed without adverse effect. These values for exposure of the eye or skin apply to ultraviolet radiation from arcs, gas and vapor discharges, flourescent and incandescent sources, and solar radiation, but do not apply to ultraviolet lasers. These values do not apply to ultraviolet radiation exposure of photosensitive individuals or of individuals concomitantly exposed to photosensitizing agents. These values should be used as guides in the control of exposure to continuous sources where the exposure duration shall not be less that 0.1 sec (Figure 1).

Figure 1

These values should be used as guides in the control of exposure to ultraviolet sources and should not be regarded as a fine line between safe and dangerous levels.

Recommended Values

The threshold limit value for occupational exposure to ultraviolet radiation incident upon skin or eye where irradiance values are known and exposure time is controlled are as follows:

1. For the near ultraviolet spectral region (320 to 400 nm), total radiance incident upon the unprotected skin or eye should not exceed 1 mW/cm for periods greated than 110 seconds (approximately 16 minutes) and for exposure times less than 10 seconds should not exceed one J/cm.

2. For the actinic ultraviolet spectral region (200 to 315 nm), radiant exposure incident upon the unprotected skin or eye should not exceed the values given in Table 2 within an 8-hour period.

Table 2
Relative Spectral Effectiveness by Wavelength*

Wavelength (nm)	TLV (mJ/cm^2)	Relative Special Effectiveness Sl
200	100	0.03
210	40	0.075
220	25	0.12
230	16	0.19

240	10	0.30
250	7	0.43
254	6	0.5
260	4.6	0.65
270	3.0	1.0
280	3.4	0.88
290	4.7	0.64
300	10	0.30
305	50	0.60
310	200	0.015
315	1000	0.003

* See Laser TLVS.

3. To determine the effective irradiance of a broadband source weighted against the peak of the spectral effectiveness curve (270 nm), the following weighting formula should be used:

$$E_{eff} = \Sigma E\lambda \, S\lambda \, \Delta \lambda$$

where:

E_{eff} = effective irradinace relative to a monochromatic source at 270 nm in W/cm^2 [J/ (s cm^2)]

$E\lambda$ = spectral irradiance in W/(cm nm)

$S\lambda$ = relative spectral effectiveness (unitless)

$\Delta \lambda$ = band width in manometers

4. Permissible exposure time in seconds for exposure to actinic ultraviolet radiation incident upon the unprotected skin or eye may be computed by dividing 0.003 J/cm^2 by E_{eff} in W/cm^2. The exposure time may also be determined using Table 3 which provides exposure times corresponding to effective irradiances in μ W/cm^2.

Table 3 **Permissible Ultraviolet Exposures**

Duration of Exposure Per Day	**Effective Irradiance E_{eff} (m W/cm^2)**
8 hrs	0.1
4 hrs	0.2
2 hrs	0.4
1 hr	0.8
30 min	1.7
15 min	3.3
10 min	5.0
5 min	10.0
1 min	50.0
30 sec	100.0
10 sec	300.0
1 sec	3,000.0
0.5 sec	6,000.0
0.1 sec	30,000.0

5. All the preceding TLVs for ultraviolet energy apply to sources which subtend an angle less than 80 degrees. Sources which subtend a greater angle need to be measured only over an angle of 80 degrees.

Conditioned (tanned) individuals can tolerate skin exposure in excess of the TLV without erythemal effects. However, such conditioning may not protect persons against cancer.

Reference

1. Sunlight and Man. Fitzpatrick et all Eds. University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, Japan (1974).

2. Threshold Limit Values and Biological Exposures Indices for 1986 - 1987. American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists, 6500 Glenway Avenue, Building D-7, Cincinnati, Ohio 45211-4438.