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**Employee FAQ:
Sun Protective Clothing**

**What is sun protective clothing?**

Sun protective clothing are hats, shirts, pants, shoes, gloves, etc. that cover sufficient skin and are made from fabrics with a tight weave that don’t allow UV rays to pass through them. The most sun protective hats have a wide brim all the way around or a Legionnaire’s style flap in the back.

**What is UPF?**

UPF stands for Ultraviolet Protection Factor. It indicates what fraction of the sun’s ultraviolet rays (UVA and UVB) can penetrate fabric. A shirt with a UPF of 50, for example, allows just 1/50th of the sun’s UV radiation to reach the skin. Clothing and sunscreen are different and tested differently. SPF for sunscreen is a measure of only UVB protection.

**What other factors can make fabric sun protective?**

Other factors that affect the sun safety of clothing include its color, the thickness of the fabric, the fiber content, how much it stretches, and how it reacts when wet. Lighter colors of fabrics feel cooler because they reflect infrared light, but darker colors absorb UV better and provide more protection for the skin. Fabrics that stretch can allow more UV to pass through. When wet, some fabrics stretch and allow more UV through while other fabrics shrink and block more UV.

**How can I tell if my clothes are sun safe?**

You don’t have to have your clothes tested for UPF in order to tell if they are sun protective. Wear hats with a tight weave and wide brim. Wear clothes that cover a lot of skin. Choose clothes with dark colors and a tight weave. To assess UV protection of a garment easily, hold the material up to a bright light and see how much visible light you can see through the holes in the weave. If the visible light can get through so can the invisible ultraviolet light. Look for fabrics with the tightest weave and the lightest weight or cooling properties for hotter weather.

**Does all clothing need to be labeled with a UPF?**

No. According to U.S. standards, only clothing whose manufacturer claims that it protects against UV, claims the reduction of risk of skin injury associated with UV exposure, or uses a rating system that quantifies the amount of UV protection afforded needs to be labeled with a UPF value and classification category.

**What are the Classification Categories?**

According to U.S. guidelines, the three classification categories for sun protective fabrics and clothing: Good UV Protection (for UPF 15 to 24), Very Good UV Protection (for UPF 25 to 39) and Excellent UV Protection (for UPF 40 to 50+).

**How is fabric tested for UPF?**

Fabric is tested with special reflectance equipment called a spectrophotometer, not on human subjects like sunscreen is tested. If labeled as sun protective, the clothing must have a UPF between 15 and 50+.

**What UPF should I choose?**

For sun protection, choose clothing with a UPF 15 or more. A UPF 15 blocks 93% of UVA and UVB. A UPF 50+ blocks 98% of UVA and UVB.

**How long does the UPF last?**

In the U.S., a UPF rating should indicate the minimum UPF for the typical life of the garment (about two years of normal wash and wear). However, very old, threadbare or faded garments may have a lower UPF rating.