

Employers who take every precaution to protect their outdoor workers from the wet and cold may be doing too little to guard them from the effects of the sun, warns a local solicitor.

“No decent employer would send his or her employees out into the rain or cold without waterproof or thermal clothing but, as the current heat-wave shows, sunshine can be just as much of a foreseeable occupational hazard in the borough,” says Mike Pitt, employment-law partner at Pearson Hinchliffe, Queen Street.

“If employees don’t take reasonable precautions to protect the health of their employees, the matter may end up in the courts.”

One risk is skin cancer, which can be caused by exposure to UV radiation from the sun. It is one of the most common cancers in the UK, with around 100,000 new cases diagnosed every year. Yet there is no legal obligation for employers to give sunscreen to their employees.

A survey by UK health and safety experts Croner reveals that only around two-thirds (67 per cent) of health and safety specialists support subsidising sunscreen for staff who work outdoors this summer. This compares to a much higher figure of 80 per cent taken from identical research three years ago.

Mr Pitt advises Oldham employers to: encourage workers to keep their shirts on at work, apply sunscreen of at least SPF 15 to exposed areas, and drink plenty of water; place water and rest points in the shade, and encourage workers to take their breaks in the shade; include sun-protection advice and the warning signs of skin cancer in routine health and safety training.