

Marching Band and Sun ... A Dangerous Combination!

Thomas V. Jenkins



Despite political pros and cons about global warming, greenhouse gasses and opinions of pundits, climatologists have been measuring the intensity of solar UVA and UVB rays since 1980 and they report an annual increase of 3.4%. That means that in 2015 the intensity of the sun's rays is 119% greater than in 1980.

A perfect positive correlation exists between increased solar intensity and *skin cancer*. So, with the increase in the sun's intensity there has also been an increase in skin cancer. *Every* nation in the world reports a continuing increase in skin cancer according to the World Health Association. It is epidemic! If contagious...it would be pandemic.

Some two million Americans will have skin cancer during 2015. Those numbers only portend increases for the future. The Center for Disease Control, the American Cancer Society, the Skin Cancer Foundation, the American Medical Association and other learned groups predict 1 in 5 Americans will get skin cancer depending on where they live. Most alarming, according to the Texas Medical Association, is that 1 in 3 Texans will get skin cancer...because of *where we are*.

To the point: Melanoma and Squamous Cell Carcinoma are the most dangerous kinds of skin

cancer. Johns Hopkins Medical College reports Melanoma is the most common cancer in young adults. Yale College School of Medicine reports Melanoma is now the most common cancer in women ages 25-29 and is the biggest killer of young girls under 20. Now we're getting close to the truth in the title of this article. What we think of as a benign activity in the past is now and will continue, unabated to be quite dangerous.

The effects of exposure to the sun are long reaching and arguably may be cumulative. If an individual ever experiences a sun burn he/she will probably have skin cancer during his/her lifetime! Sun screens were developed in 1949. Prior to that time, there was no protection. Evidence of these statements can be seen in the number of elderly people in the offices of dermatologists all over the world.

One marching band rehearsal or one holiday parade can cause misery for a person in the years to come. So, it is not just wise but imperative for every band member to protect themselves. How? By making the application of a good sunscreen on the parts of the body that will be exposed to the sun...every day! This demands a severe behavior modification. For everybody! Every day! For the rest of your life!

If I have your attention, let us address the criteria of a good sunscreen. Start with the label. It must read "Broad Spectrum". That means that the product protects against both the UVA and UVB rays of the sun. It must also contain an SPF rating of at least 30. SPF stands for Solar (sun) Protective Factor. Why 30? An SPF rating of 30 will give approximately 98% protection for up to five hours in the sun. Ratings in excess of 30 are available...at a cost. Usually the cost is significant while the protection of 2% is not. The choice is debatable.

While on the subject of the SPF, is there such a thing as a natural SPF? The answer is yes! Fair skinned, blue-eyed blondes will burn after as few as ten minutes in the sun unprotected. Darker skinned people enjoy a little more exposure before burning. Skin cancer is color blind, however. Even those with the darkest skin will burn after varying amounts of time in the sun and are very much in danger of severe skin cancer.

A lotion is the most desirable sunscreen. It is easier to apply and gives better coverage. Aerosol sunscreens may be inviting but are dangerous. The propellant is most often flammable and many people have been severely burned after exposure to outdoor grills or other flames following the application of

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an aerosol sunscreen. Avoid a sunscreen that contains a fragrance. Perspiration mixed with a fragrance can attract nuisances like bees and other flying insects. Avoid a product that contains PABA, 4-Aminobenzoic acid. Why it was ever included in the ingredients of some sun protectors defies reason. It has little positive benefit. Some people are allergic to it and, it can stain your clothes. Avoid any product that claims to be a sunblock! There is no such thing as a sunblock and the FDA does not recognize claims to the contrary.

When are "safe" times? One reads where an expert says before 9:00 AM and after 4:00 PM is "safe". This is Texas! The only safe times are before sunrise and after sunset. If one can feel the intensity of the sun as early as 7:00 AM or after 6:00 PM you can burn.

Band Directors, don't gamble with your band member's lives and...don't allow them to. Insist that they wear a sunscreen that meets the standards above.

Finally, don't take my word for it. Do your own research. The internet is rich in valuable information concerning the dangers touched on in this article. Simply enter the words skin cancer, step back and let your search engine do the rest.

Thomas V. Jenkins earned the B.S. and M.A. degrees from Sam Houston State University and the Ph.D. from The University of Texas. Dr. Jenkins was a founder of three collegiate institutions during a career spanning forty-two years as an administrator. He spent twenty-seven years as the President of three community colleges. Now retired, he lives in Wimberley, Texas with his wife Nancy. He enjoys performing with several volunteer ensembles and playing golf.