

For further information:
John Millett, EPA
(202) 564-7842
millett.john@epa.gov

Carmeyia Gillis, NOAA
(301) 763-8000 ext 7163
carmeyia.gillis@noaa.gov

EPA and NOAA's National Weather Service Adopt New Global Ultraviolet Index Guidelines

Guidance helps reduce overexposure to dangerous UV rays

Washington, DC, May 26, 2004 – The EPA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Weather Service today announced the new Global Ultraviolet (UV) Index, which replaces the existing UV reporting methods in the United States.

Developed by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, and other international organizations, the Global UV Index is a set of guidelines designed to better help people understand which precautions to take to protect themselves from different levels of UV radiation. These guidelines will standardize reporting of surface UV radiation levels in the United States with reporting in other nations. The Government of Canada also is adopting the guidelines today.

“With summer around the corner and sun-drenched beaches beckoning, it's easy to forget that the sunlight that feels so good can be harmful,” said EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt. “Our new UV index is a quick and easy way for people to know when it's important to use sunscreen and to avoid too much sun.”

Retired Air Force Brig. General David L. Johnson, Director of NOAA's National Weather Service, agreed, adding, “Each year more than one million people are diagnosed with skin cancer in the United States, making it the most common form of cancer in the country. Clearly, there is a need for more guidance with UV index information, which we are providing today.”

The UV Index is a measure of the amount of skin-damaging UV radiation reaching the earth's surface. Currently, UV Index forecasts issued by the National Weather Service provide information about UV intensity during the solar noon hour (1:00 p.m. daylight saving time) of the following day. The UV Index informs people when rays will be strongest so that they can take action to protect themselves. Overexposure to UV radiation from the sun is a preventable contributor to serious health effects, particularly skin cancer. Incidence of malignant melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, has more than doubled in the United States in the last thirty years.

“We are excited that the US is adopting the Global UV Index,” said Dr. James Spencer, Co-Chair of the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention and Professor of Dermatology at the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. “If people use the Index to protect themselves from the sun during peak UV intensity hours, their chances of UV-related health problems – like skin cancer – will decrease greatly.”

The National Weather Service and EPA will provide daily UV forecasts for 58 major metropolitan areas, as well as forecasts by zip code. Information about the Global UV Index, including downloadable files and links to sites about UV radiation, is available on EPA’s website at www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvilaunch.html.