

Don't Get Burned by Your Lights

Teachers in Saskatchewan, Canada, attended a day-long meeting in their school gym. By the end of the day, more than 20 teachers experienced sunburn-like inflammation of their faces and exposed necks and arms. Many also experienced painful eye inflammation. The cause of the burns was determined to be a 400 watt R-type metal halide lamp (bulb) in the gymnasium. The bulb was missing its outer protective shield, exposing the teachers to excess levels of ultraviolet radiation.

Do you know what kind of bulbs your lights contain? Before you look, turn off the lights—you could be exposed to harmful radiation. If you are in a leased facility, check with your landlord. These inspections are especially important before events that require people to remain under the lights for extended periods of time.

If you have R-type lamps, inspect them frequently to ensure that they are not damaged. You might consider investing in other types of lamps. T-type metal halide lamps are designed to self-extinguish within 15 minutes after the outer glass envelope is broken or punctured. Mount metal halide lamps (R- or T-types) in an enclosed fixture with a lens/diffuser material able to contain hot lamp fragments. If a lamp is damaged, the lens/diffuser will absorb stray ultraviolet light. If there is any chance that a lamp may be exposed to moisture (such as a roof leak), mount it in an enclosed fixture—it's likely to explode if it comes in contact with moisture.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.