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NORTH EAST FIREFIGHTERS ON RED ALERT TO HELP SAVE LIVES THIS SUMMER

YOU'VE seen Baywatch, now meet Red Watch!

North East fire-fighters – all members of Red Watch based at Wallsend Community Fire Station – have teamed up with Cancer Research UK to help promote the charity's lifesaving SunSmart campaign.

The SunSmart campaign focuses on those most at risk of skin cancer and the charity has its sights firmly fixed on holidaymakers this year.

To illustrate the dangers of burning the fire fighters - from Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service - painted their faces red while visiting Tynemouth beach.

Julia Haran, Cancer Research UK spokesperson, said: "Our local fire fighters are helping with a light-hearted way to get across a very serious message – make sure you never burn."

"Getting sunburnt can double your risk of skin cancer and yet many people still believe that going red is all part of getting a tan."

Experts believe that the rates of skin cancer are set to treble in the next 30 years unless there is a radical change of behaviour among Brits desperate to sunbathe.

Julia Haran said: "Getting sunburnt increases the risk of skin cancer in general. But the kind of sunbathing binges that happen when people go to much sunnier climates and bake on the beach is particularly dangerous.

"This kind of intense exposure to the sun, often leading to reddening or burning, particularly increases the risk of malignant melanoma. And each year in Britain almost 2,000 people die from this form of skin cancer.

"Of course it's not just a problem for those who go abroad. People, especially those with fair skin, lots of moles or freckles or a family history of skin cancer, can be at risk of burning on summer days in the UK."

"We often forget how strong the sun can be. The sun does not need to feel hot to damage our skin. The heat in the sun comes from infra-red rays, not UV rays - so you can still burn on cool days."

Cancer Research UK advises anyone with a new unusual skin blemish or a mole that starts to change to get it checked out by their doctor, especially if they have had sunburn in the past.

Julia Haran said: "Signs to watch out for include a mole getting bigger, a mole with a ragged outline or one with a mixture of different shades of brown and black.

"Also if a mole gets inflamed or starts to bleed or itch, then get it checked out. Chances are it will not be skin cancer, but best to be on the safe side. Early detection saves lives."

Dave Simpson, assistant chief fire officer at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, said: "Our firefighters protect themselves from fire and heat as part of their job and we are happy to help highlight the danger of burning in the sun. Our job is all about saving lives. By protecting yourself, and others, from the danger of burning, you too could be helping to save lives."

To reduce the risk of skin cancer and enjoy being out in the sun, the SunSmart campaign encourages people to know their skin type and use the UV index to find out when they need to protect themselves. They should also follow the SunSmart key messages:

- **S**pend time in the shade between 11 and 3
 - **M**ake sure you never burn
 - **A**im to cover up with a t-shirt, hat and sunglasses
 - **R**emember to take extra care with children
 - **T**hen use factor 15+ sunscreen
- ... Also report mole changes or unusual skin growths promptly to your doctor.

For more information visit www.sunsmart.org.uk