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Trainer | Eye Safety

Every day in the United States, about 2,000 workers have a job-related eye injury that requires medical treatment.

1. 10–20% of eye injuries will cause temporary or permanent vision loss[1].
2. Most of these injuries could have been avoided if the proper precautions were taken[2].

The first and best way to avoid an eye injury is by avoiding the task that creates the hazard. If the task is not necessary, then do not do it. The next best control is to find engineering solutions that reduce the probability of an eye injury. Screens, guards, and automation are examples of engineering controls that can prevent eye injuries. Administrative controls are also important tools in the prevention of eye injuries. Having an eye safety policy that is known and enforced, accountability for managers to lead by example, and policies that require the use of eye protection are some examples of administrative controls for eye injuries.

One of the most common and easiest ways to prevent or reduce eye injuries is Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Wearing the appropriate eye protection correctly is the most important thing that employees can do to support an eye safety program. That sentence contains three important concepts. The lack of following even one of the three leaves you vulnerable to an eye injury.

So, what are those three concepts?

- Wearing eye protection
- Wearing the appropriate eye protection
- Wearing eye protection correctly

Wearing Eye Protection

Many employees who experience eye injuries when not wearing eye protection report that they were unaware that eye protection was required for the job that they were doing. This means that improved education, training, and hazard awareness is crucial to prevent eye injuries. Supervisors and managers must train their staff on when it is required to wear eye protection. Employees need to ask their supervisors if they are unsure whether eye protection is required or not.

Employees may be hesitant to wear eye protection for many reasons. One reason may be that eye protection interferes with the ability to perform a person's job. Management should consider alternative styles that may be better suited for the task. Factors might include tint, peripheral vision, ventilation, prescriptions, and glare.

1   National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/eye
2   Prevent Blindness America – Workplace Eye Safety: www.preventblindness.org/safety/worksafe.html

Some eye protection may not be fashionable or comfortable, so management should consider different brands and styles that can be comfortable, stylish, and effective. The shape and size of people's faces are different – what may be comfortable to some may be uncomfortable to others.

Wearing the Appropriate Eye Protection

Eye protection may not prevent an eye injury if it is not the right type for a specific job. Safety glasses, goggles, face shields (do not offer protection from impacts, used for splashes, dusts, heat, etc. – safety glasses are needed under face shields), and welding shields are some of the different types of available eye protection. Make certain that your employees use the right kind of eye protection for the hazards that they encounter. Common eye hazards include dust, chemicals, flying objects, bright light, and high heat. Employees should ask their supervisors if they are unsure which eye protection is appropriate for their specific tasks.

Wearing Eye Protection Correctly

Eye protection will not be of any value if it rests against one's forehead or hangs on a cord around one's neck. Be aware of eye protection that is in need of replacement. Scratched, dirty, or broken eye protection should be replaced. Wearing eye protection correctly also means finding the style that fits a person best. It should fit snugly against a person's face minimizing gaps, not sliding down the nose and exposing one's eyes.

Keep the following pointers in mind as you develop an effective eye safety program:

- Eliminate hazards before starting work – use guarding, screens, or other engineering controls to eliminate eye hazards
- Set up and maintain emergency eyewash stations
- Find eye protection that is comfortable and stylish
- Provide eyewear holders/straps to make certain that eyewear is handy and protected
- Train employees on how to get replacement eye protection
- Train employees on your eye safety policy
- Enforce the eye safety policy
- Set example with supervisors and managers wearing their eye protection
- **Wear** the **appropriate** eye protection **correctly**

With simple precautions, an eye injury that carries serious and life-long implications can be avoided.

Safety tips developed based on generally accepted safety standards believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is for general guidance only and should not be relied upon for legal compliance purposes.

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