

Eye Safety At Work

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Eye Protection

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A company might issue you tools, safety equipment, and some kind of protective clothing, but there is one thing that cannot be issued—a new set of eyes. If something happens to your eyes, there is no quick fix. Medical science can replace a lot of things on and in your body, but when your eyes are gone, they are gone forever.

Thousands of eye injuries occur in the workplace each year, warranting the need for total eye protection. Wearing the eye protection that your job or location requires is a simple way to keep your eyes safe.

Your eyes are delicate and very easy to damage. A hard blow is not necessary to cause injury. In fact, all it takes is a tiny sliver or speck of metal, a particle of dust, or trace of chemical to do a great deal of damage to your eyes.

If you are exposed to dust, acids, molten metals, grinding wheels, hazardous flashes—you need to take the proper precautions and protect your eyes. If you don't, it's possible to lose the precious gift of sight, meaning you may never see your wife, husband, or children again.

It is a good thing to remember that OSHA rules establish minimum standards for both employer and employee. Here is a portion of that standard. It deals with eye and face protection standards.

“The employer shall ensure that each affected employee uses eye or face protection when exposed to eye or face hazards from flying particles, molten metals, liquids, chemicals, acids or caustic liquids, chemical gases or vapors, or potentially injurious light radiation.”

If you wear contact lenses, remember: a contact lens was not designed to provide eye protection. Also, it is a good idea to have a pair of prescription eyeglasses available in case you need to remove your contact lenses.

Many people consider getting a particle in the eye a simple inconvenience and wait for tears to wash the speck out. But contact wearers can find this a painful surprise that distracts them from whatever they are doing, and that can be dangerous. Sharp particles can scratch the cornea of the eye, leading to severe complications. When this happens, it is important to remove the lens immediately.

If discomfort persists after removing the lens, cleaning the lens with a sterile solution, flushing the eye with cool water, and re-inserting a lens, the wearer should seek medical attention immediately.

Prescription glasses and full goggles should replace contact lenses when you work with caustic solutions. If a caustic solution accidentally splashes in the eye, the contact wearer should first try to flush out the eye with cool water rather than take out the lens. Then, the contact should be removed and the eye again flushed. However, a cornea burn cannot occur if, when using harsh chemicals, the appropriate eye protection is worn—full goggles, not safety glasses with side shields.

Never try to remove a foreign matter, other than a contact lens, from your own eye. Also, never try to remove a foreign material from the eye of another worker. Playing doctor will probably make the condition worse. Get to the company medical department or a doctor right away for treatment of an eye problem.

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If you use safety glasses, remember to take care of them so they can protect you when you need to be protected most. Here are a few tips:

1. Make sure your glasses fit. If they don't fit properly, you might be tempted not to wear them. If your safety glasses slip, seem crooked, or are too tight, take a few minutes and have them adjusted properly.
2. Keep your glasses clean. Dirty glasses lessen visibility. Wash them regularly with mild soap and water or eyeglass cleaner, then polish with a soft cloth or a tissue. Anti-dust and anti-fog sprays work well on both glass and plastic lenses.
3. Keep your glasses in a case when you are not using them. Pits, scratches, or other damage can result if you stick your glasses in a pocket or toss them in a tool box. Damage to lenses can lessen impact-resistance and, thus, provide less than full protection. Also, don't hang your goggles by the elastic band. This can stretch the band so it does not fit properly.

Once again, remember, you are on your last pair of eyes. OSHA and company rules demand the use of eye protection on certain jobs. Different jobs and locations require different kinds of eye protection. You all have been told what kind of eye protection you should wear, when you should wear it, and where you should wear it.

In the end, all the company does to protect your eyes will not be effective unless you cooperate. You are the only person who can make sure you wear the proper eye protection at the necessary and required times.

However, you should never neglect eye protection just because a specific job does not demand it. This is where you must use common sense and exercise good safety practices to provide yourself with that extra margin of safety for your eyes.

If there is ever any doubt in your mind about the eye protection needed on any job or in any location, consult your supervisor. Don't guess and possibly spend the rest of your life with the ultimate consequence of blindness.