

# Healthy Vision in the Workplace

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Vision & Lifestyle

**FACT:** According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), every day, nearly 2,000 U.S. workers sustain job-related, vision threatening, eye injuries requiring medical attention.

There are a variety of hazards, accidents and activities that lead to these injuries: chemical, grease or oil splashes, burns from steam, ultraviolet or infrared radiation exposure, and flying chips of wood or metal. Objects in the eye often cause minor irritations but there is risk of more severe damage if the eye receives cuts or scrapes.

Additionally, workers in many professions run the risk of acquiring infectious eye diseases. Some of these diseases can be transmitted through the mucous membranes of the eye if workers are accidentally splashed with blood, receive respiratory droplets generated during coughing or touch their eyes with contaminated fingers.

**FACT:** Wearing protective eyewear reduces the chance of eye injuries. Experts agree that 90 percent of all eye injuries in the workplace could be prevented by wearing properly designed and properly fitted protective eyewear. In reviewing cases of work-related eye injuries, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) found that in approximately 60 percent of the cases workers failed to wear proper protective eyewear.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandates the use of eye and face protection wherever the potential for eye injuries exist.<sup>1</sup> But mandates are insufficient without proper selection and education.<sup>2</sup>

## Protect Your Eyes

Employers and workers play major roles in ensuring eye safety on the job.

As a worker, there are four key elements to protecting your eyes from injury:

1. Know the eye safety dangers at work.
2. Eliminate hazards before you start work such as using machine guards, work screens or other engineering controls.
3. Wear the proper eye protection and make sure it is correctly fitted.
4. Keep your safety eyewear in good condition and replace it if it is damaged.

Employers play an important role in this as well. Here are some steps to make the work environment as safe as possible:

1. Conduct an eye hazard assessment.
2. Remove or reduce eye hazards whenever possible.
3. Provide appropriate safety eyewear and require your employees to wear it.
4. Initiate ongoing education and communication programs to reinforce the need and value of eyewear protection.

Employers may choose to implement a Vision Conservation Program to administer all aspects of eye safety. Vision Conservation Programs are most successful when inclusive of occupational health, safety officers, industrial hygiene and optometrist professionals. Members of the American Optometric Association (AOA) are able to assist in determining potential eye hazards and recommending the proper type of eye protection to avoid injuries.

## No One Style or Size Fits All

Just as you need to be properly fitted for prescription glasses or contacts, your protective eyewear needs to be fitted and designed to match the hazards. What type of protection best suits the task or tasks can be determined through a hazard assessment for each activity. Some details on the types of protective eyewear to consider are:

**Non-prescription and prescription safety glasses:** While safety glasses resemble normal eyewear, they are designed to provide significantly more protection. Lenses and frames are much stronger than regular eyeglasses and are constructed to prevent the lenses from shattering or being pushed toward the eyes. Safety glasses must meet rigid standards of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Look for the ANSI Z87.1 mark on the lens or frame.<sup>3</sup> If you work in areas with small particles, flying objects or dust your safety glasses should include side protection provided by the use of side shields or wraparound-style safety glasses.

Safety lenses are available in glass, plastic, polycarbonate and Trivex® materials. While all four types must meet or exceed the minimum requirements for protecting your eyes, polycarbonate and Trivex® lenses provide the highest level of protection from impact.

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