What do your eyes mean to you? They are vital in how we view the world around us. Sight is essential because it allows us to connect with our surroundings, watch our children or grandchildren grow, watch the sun rise or set, and see all the beautiful things around us. It is arguably the most important of the five senses for safety and self-preservation and it also provides awareness of the dangers around us.

Now imagine not being able to use your eyes. Never watching your children or grandchildren grow. Not being able to provide for your family properly. Eye injuries in the workplace are very common; approximately 1 in 10 injuries require one or more missed days of work for recovery. Of the total amount of work-related eye injuries, about 10-20% could cause temporary or permanent vision loss. Many experts believe that the correct eye protection could have lessened the severity of, or even prevented, 90% of eye injuries in accidents.

What are the common causes of workplace eye injuries?

- Flying/falling objects (bits of metal, glass)
- Tools
- Particles
- Chemicals (this includes splashing or chemicals being sprayed directly into the eye)
- Harmful radiation
- Any combination of these or other hazards
- Approximately 60% of the objects causing eye injury are smaller than a pin head

Why do these injuries occur?

- The worker was not wearing any eye protection at the time of the accident.
- The worker was wearing the wrong kind of eye protection and therefore it failed to adequately protect (a leading cause in this category is the lack of side shields).
- The employer doesn’t supply any eye protection.
- The employer provides eye protection, but workers won’t wear it.
- The employer doesn’t enforce the use of eye protection or train the workers how to use protective equipment.
• The eye protection is inadequate, such as using glasses when the job requires a face shield.
• The eye protection doesn’t fit properly – for example, glasses are loose and allow particles to enter from the sides.
• The eye protection is not well-maintained.

What is my best defense against an eye injury?
• Know the eye dangers at work.
• Eliminate hazards before starting work (use machine guarding, work screens, or other engineering controls).
• Use proper eye protection for the task. The eye injuries that occur to workers wearing eye protection result from objects or chemicals going around or under the protector.
• Make sure the eye protection you have selected is clean and fits properly. One of the leading reasons workers remove or don’t wear eye protection is the lens becoming dirty or fogged up, limiting their vision.

When should I protect my eyes at work?
• You should wear safety eyewear whenever there is a chance of eye injury. Anyone working in or passing through areas that pose eye hazards should wear protective eyewear.
• Look carefully at your work operations. Inspect all work areas, access routes, and equipment for hazards to eyes. Identify operations and areas that present eye hazards.

What type of safety eyewear protection is available to me?
• Non-prescription and prescription safety glasses
• Goggles
• Face shields
• Welding helmets
• Full-face respirators

What type of safety eye protection should I wear?
The kind of safety eye protection you should wear depends on the hazards in your workplace.
• If you are working in an area that has particles, flying objects, or dust, you must at least wear safety glasses with side protection (side shields).
• If you are working with chemicals, you should wear goggles.
• If you are working near hazardous radiation (welding, lasers) you must use special-purpose safety glasses, goggles, face shields, or helmets designed for that task.

What can employers do to protect employees at work?
• Ensure safety eyewear/goggles are ANSI Z87 approved and utilized at all times when eye hazards are present.
• Inspect work areas and work tasks to identify areas and operations that could present eye hazards.
• Establish a mandatory safety program that requires all employees to wear safety eyewear/goggles in work areas and work tasks that could present eye hazards.
• Provide orientation and continuing education training to all employees regarding eye safety and acceptable practices for preventing eye injuries in the workplace.
• Inspect eyewash stations periodically for accessibility, activation ability, and needed cleaning
• Make certain all employees know the location of the nearest eyewash station and are trained on the proper use of an eyewash station.
• Ensure that management is setting a good example by following adopted eye safety programs and wearing protective eyewear/goggles in work areas requiring such protection.
• Continually review eye safety programs, policies, and procedures for appropriate changes. If change is needed, ensure that changes are formally communicated to employees.

We perceive up to 80% of all impressions using our sight, but we usually don’t think about this until it’s too late. Our eyes play a vital role in our daily lives and is essential for activities such as working, reading, watching television, Internet surfing, driving, etc. Using proper eye protection can help make sure we keep our eyesight for all the important things in our lives.

Let’s Keep Our Eyes on Safety and Help Prevent Eye Injuries!
References


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