

SAFETY ASSOCIATIONS OF UTAH

Quarterly Safety Newsletter

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Eye Safety in the Workplace

More than 2,000 people injure their eyes at work each day, with 10-20 percent resulting in temporary or permanent vision loss. About one-third of these injuries are treated in hospital emergency rooms and more than 100 result in one or more days of lost work. However, 90 percent of all workplace eye injuries can be avoided by using the proper safety eyewear.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the average cost of a disabling eye injury at nearly \$4,000 with a cumulative annual cost of all reported eye injuries at nearly \$355 million.

Management can help reduce the number of eye injuries in the workplace by making sure that employees are wearing the correct safety eyewear.

Common causes of eye injuries

- Flying objects (bits of metal, glass, etc.)
- Tools
- Dust, dirt, aggregate, exhaust by products and metal particles
- Chemicals (acid, bases, fuels, solvents)
- Welding light and electrical arc

Common type of eye injuries

- Corneal abrasions and conjunctivitis (red eye)
- Aggregate or metal particles or slivers embedded in the eye
- Chemical or petroleum splash or burn
- Welder's flash burn
- Eyeball laceration
- Facial contusion and black eye
- Blood borne pathogen exposure from blood and other body fluids

Safety eyewear protection includes

- Non-prescription and prescription safety glasses. Use safety glasses for general working conditions where there may be minor dust, chips or flying particles
- Googles. Use googles for higher impact protection, greater dust, and chemical splash
- Face shields. Use face shields for highest impact, full-face protection for spraying, chipping and grinding hazards
- Welding helmets. Use welding helmets when welding to protect against the exposure of welding light that causes severe burns to the eye and surrounding tissue

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Safety eyewear tips for workers

- Safety eyewear must have "ANSI Z87" clearly marked on all glasses or goggles and should be worn at all times whenever eye hazards are present
- Always select the proper safety eyewear that is designed for the specific duty or hazard
- Safety eyewear should be reasonably comfortable and fit snugly
- Don't wear dirty, greasy, scratched, pitted or badly worn safety eyewear, as they can distort your vision and greatly reduce the lenses' impact resistance

Eyewear Stations and Showers

The federal regulations state eyewash stations and showers are required "Where the eyes or body of any person may be exposed to injurious corrosive material, suitable facilities for quick drenching or flushing of the eye and body shall be provided within the work area for immediate emergency use."

Employers first need to determine whether or not they are required to provide this type of equipment. To do this, they should identify hazards and determine the exposures.

Employers should evaluate factors such as: physical state, pH, temperature and reactivity. Employers should consult; MSDS, manufacturer, chemical guidance, NIOSH pocket guide to chemical hazards and Toxicology of the Eye by W. Morton Grant.

Employers should consider: equipment, handling and use and worksite conditions.

Once it has been determined that this type of equipment is necessary, the next step is to choose the type of station needed. There are two types available.

The first is plumbed unit and the other a self contained unit. These must be located on the same level as the hazard (must be immediately adjacent for strong acids and caustics). The area must be well list and clearly identified. The access to the station must be free of obstructions and be located no more than 10 seconds away (approximately 55 feet). Employers must also address the following: flushing fluid, flow rate, water temperature and activation.

The flushing fluid must be potable water, preserved water, persevered buffered saline solution or other medically acceptable solution. Regarding the flow rate, they must be capable of providing .4 gallons per minute for 15 minutes and showers 20 gallons per minute for 15 minutes. The temperature of the flushing fluid should be between 60 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

**This bulletin is intended only as a reminder and is offered solely as a guide to assist management in its responsibility of providing a safer working environment. This bulletin is not intended to cover all possible hazardous conditions or unsafe acts that may exist. Other unsafe acts or hazardous conditions should be noted and corrective action taken.*