

WORKPLACE EYE SAFETY – PROTECT YOUR EYES WHILE WORKING

Despite existing safety legislation and educational programs, each working day in the United States, more than 2,000 employees sustain job-related eye injuries, making workplace injury a leading cause of ocular trauma, visual loss and blindness. Of these, 10 to 20 percent will be disabling because of temporary or permanent vision loss. Ninety percent of these injuries can be prevented with appropriate protective eyewear. Many of those injured workers reported that they didn't think they needed to wear eye protection or were wearing eyewear inappropriate for the job. Safety eyewear must have "ANSI Z87.1" marked on the frame or lens.

"Most workers have safety glasses and know when they are to be worn. The injuries we see often occur because the worker didn't want to wear their safety glasses, their safety glasses were dirty, they forgot them, or they feel they see better without their safety glasses. Most people think of wearing safety glasses when using power tools. Many of the serious injuries I have seen involve hammering a nail," explains Dr. John Rowda of the West Coast Eye Institute in Lecanto.

Dr. Rowda, an ophthalmologist, states that wearing proper eye protection is a matter of vital importance to worker health and safety because industries such as construction and automotive repair can be hazardous to your vision.

As more people use computers in the workplace, complaints of eye fatigue, difficulty focusing and discomfort have also become common. We've moved into the computer age, but our offices haven't. Lighting, furniture and desk configurations that worked fine for typewriters add to fatigue and discomfort when working with computers.

"Computer screens don't damage vision, but you might still experience eye strain. Fortunately, rearranging your computer workstation, taking more frequent rest breaks or getting proper glasses or contact lenses can often relieve these symptoms," states Dr. Rowda. "Most important for people over 40 is to have glasses that allows them to see the screen without tilting their head."

"In addition, heating and air conditioning systems of office buildings can increase problems with dry eyes during the winter," states Dr. Rowda. Dry eye occurs when the eye doesn't produce enough tears to keep the eye comfortable. Usual symptoms include stinging or burning eyes, scratchiness, a feeling that there's something in the eye, excessive tearing or difficulty wearing contact lenses. Over-the-counter eye drops usually do the trick, but if the problems persist, see your ophthalmologist or eye care professional for an evaluation.

To learn about protective eyewear for your occupation and/or to pinpoint the cause of your discomfort, see your ophthalmologist or eye care professional for an evaluation.

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