

TOOLBOX TALK #12

EYE PROTECTION

How can I prevent eye injuries in the workplace?

A person's eyesight is often taken for granted. It's easy to overlook the dangers to our eyes that we encounter every day. Unfortunately, eye injuries in the workplace are very common. More than 1000 workers sustain job-related eye injuries each day that require medical treatment, and one-third of these injuries require hospital emergency room care and result in lost work time. Collectively, these injuries cost U.S. businesses more than \$300 million per year – not to mention the toll on the injured and their families.

Eye injuries can happen at any time and from a variety of sources. Common eye injuries at work can be the result of chemical splashes, dusty environments, excessive bright lights, ultraviolet radiation exposure, compressed air tools or welding. These injuries can quickly mount in costs for employers – both in terms of lost productivity as well as in medical and workers' compensation costs. Most importantly, the goal should be to prevent injuries that can cause traumatic and lasting impact on employees – before they happen.

First and foremost, it's imperative to acknowledge the risk. Although some occupations carry more risks than others, many reported annually from within the construction trades, mainly plumbers, electricians, and pipefitters. These trades experience projectile particles that can be particularly hazardous to eye safety. Employers must take steps to make the work environment as safe as possible. This includes conducting an eye hazard assessment of the workplace and reducing the risk of eye hazards to a minimum. Ultimately, the most important and easiest form of eye protection is the use of safety glasses or goggles.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 3 out of every 5 eye injuries happen to people who are not wearing eye protection. Safety experts and eye doctors believe that correct eye protection can lessen the severity of or even prevent 90% of eye injuries.



It's far easier to prepare for an accident than to explain why you didn't. Eye injuries in the workplace can cause permanent damage to the employee and cost employers millions, so it's critically important that employers and employees work together to make eye safety a priority. For employers, this means providing workers with the appropriate protection equipment and supplies. It also means instituting safety policies and educating employees on these policies. While employers need to provide a safe working environment, employees must also take responsibility for their own eye safety by ensuring they're following employer safety policies and using eye protection equipment correctly.