



Tips for Delivering a Comprehensive Safety Eyewear Program

A comprehensive safety eyewear program is of paramount importance to overall workforce safety. Whether hazards range from nuisance particles to flying debris or chemical splash, it is every employer's responsibility to provide the appropriate level of safety eyewear for the job. If not properly protected, resulting eye injuries can range from minor irritation and scratches to short-term or permanent blindness – even the loss of an eye. The financial impact of eye injuries is significant and spans lost production, medical care, legal fees, workers compensation and insurance premium increases. The good news is an estimated ninety percent of eye injuries can be avoided by wearing the proper safety eyewear.

Today, safety managers have more options than ever when it comes to protecting workers' vision. From plano safety spectacles and goggles to new hybrid offerings and prescription options, there is truly something to meet every individual's needs.

Especially in high-hazard or multi-hazard environments, it is important to outfit workers with the full scope of safety eyewear necessary. Today, safety managers have more options than ever when it comes to protecting workers' vision. From plano safety spectacles and goggles to new hybrid offerings and prescription options, there is truly something to meet every individual's needs. This article discusses key considerations for delivering an effective, comprehensive safety eyewear program.

Assess the hazards

The first steps toward workplace eye safety are for a safety manager to conduct a thorough facility walk-through and to assess the hazards faced by employees in each zone. Look for machinery, flying objects and airborne debris, and chemicals that could come in contact with the eyes. Also review material safety data sheets for specific safety precautions. Based on this



information, determine the appropriate level of eye protection required for each individual. Remember, OSHA calls for employers to provide eyewear that meets the American National Standards Institute's ANSI Z87.1-2010 standard for impact protection; such eyewear is marked with "Z87" on every major component. For high-impact hazards, eyewear that meets military-grade ballistic protection, known as Military Velocity Sub-Zero (Mil V₀), should be considered.

Select the proper type of eyewear

Next, it is time to begin selecting the types and styles of eyewear for workers. Plano eyewear looks like regular glasses and provides basic impact protection; wraparound styles afford the user increased coverage and peripheral protection. Finally, because appearance plays a proven role in compliance, consider modern styling options such as sleek, lightweight, semi-frameless, wraparound or sport-inspired frames.

In addition to confirming that the styles selected meet ANSI requirements, be sure to look for comfort and fit features that help the eyewear stay in place securely and ensure all-day comfort.

Goggles, which seal tightly to the face, are mandated for individuals in high-dust environments and for those exposed to hazardous chemicals. However, goggles are also prone to fogging and may seem clunky, heavy or uncomfortable to wear. Sealed eyewear is a relatively new and increasingly popular option for extreme environments. A hybrid between spectacles and goggles, sealed eyewear looks and fits like a spectacle but offers the added protection of a goggle-type seal in a comfortable, secure, low-profile design. Recognized for its versatility, sealed eyewear is available in an array of lens tints and coatings, with reader options for magnification, as well as with optional head straps for a tighter seal and removable foam inserts that convert the eyewear to regular spectacles.

While OTGs are an excellent option for visitors and short-term use, the best option for protecting workers who require corrective lenses and all-day protection is Rx safety eyewear.

Address vision correction

A very important – and often overlooked – aspect of delivering a comprehensive safety eyewear program is vision correction. According to the Vision Council, seventy percent of workers require vision correction, and that number is on the rise with the growing population of Baby Boomers in the workforce. Furthermore, the Council estimates that uncorrected vision problems cost businesses more than \$8 billion in lost productivity each year. When vision loss goes uncorrected, employers not only suffer from decreased productivity, but they put themselves and their employees at risk. When unable to see their work and surrounding hazards clearly, workers are more prone to experience a serious injury and companies can pay thousands, even millions, in direct and indirect costs. Every employer should make it a safety priority for its workers to operate with clear vision in their workplace and surroundings.

A popular solution to delivering eye protection for individuals who require corrective lenses is over-the-glass, or OTG, safety eyewear. However, because OTGs are worn over existing prescription frames, drawbacks abound, ranging from poor comfort and fit, to limited visibility and poor peripheral view, to clunky, unattractive styling. As a result, workers are more likely to remove their OTGs and simply rely on their standard prescription lenses. But street wear is not rated for impact protection, so workers who forgo OTGs are exposed to the same level of risk as those not wearing any protective eyewear. Like goggles, OTGs that are

large or heavy can be uncomfortable, especially during long-term wear, so when selecting OTGs look for lightweight, low-profile styles. In addition, look for OTGs with adjustability features that allow for a more customized fit. Finally, because OTGs require a worker to look through two lenses (his or her own corrective eyewear plus the OTG lens), there is potential for optical distortion. Safety managers should check in with workers wearing OTGs to make sure there are no problems.

Each pair is manufactured individually to meet the worker's specific vision needs and fit with a single, comfortable solution. And, like planos, prescription safety eyewear can feature optional side shields for added side coverage. Today, Rx safety eyewear is available in a multitude of styles to meet each individual's preferences and safety requirements. Prescription lenses are now available in sealed eyewear styles as well, delivering the comfort and fit benefits of spectacles while providing the increased protection of a goggle. When manufactured properly, prescription safety eyewear delivers fantastic results: an individual's vision is corrected, workers feel more comfortable in their eyewear, and as a result they are more likely to leave it on throughout the day, thus improving worker safety.



Managing prescription safety eyewear across the workforce can be a complicated and time-intensive process involving workforce assessment, HR benefits, billing and accounting, scheduling, eye care professionals and individualized eyewear. Options for managing Rx safety eyewear have come a long way, though. Today, solutions are available that offer Web-based management to facilitate HR review, virtual measurement and try-on for an ideal fit, and 24x7 availability to conveniently serve workers during every shift. Systems like these ensure that individuals receive the proper eyewear

for their specific tasks – and save HR and safety managers a great deal of time and frustration.

Consider the environmental impact

Finally, it is important to consider the unique environmental demands on safety eyewear. In high dirt or high particulate workplaces where lenses are prone to frequent scratching, eyewear with easy lens replacement systems may be an economical solution. Furthermore, lenses treated with anti-scratch hardcoat will last longer and provide greater value. In high-heat environments or any applications where lenses are prone to fogging, look for anti-fog coating that will not wash off even after repeated washing. Anti-fog lens wipes are another good option to ban blurred vision from moisture build-up. Whether work is conducted indoors or out, be sure to select the lens tint appropriate for the task as well as the hazards. From tints that block sunlight and glare to shades designed specifically to protect from artificial light or lasers, there's a specialized tint for every application. And because overexposure to ultraviolet can cause permanent vision damage, always be sure the safety eyewear you select delivers 99% protection from full-spectrum ultraviolet light.

When it comes to protecting workers' vision, taking a comprehensive approach to safety eyewear is a winning strategy. By selecting styles that protect from the site's specific hazards; offer comfort, fit and style features to promote all-day wear; and meet individuals' corrective requirements, employers deliver the safest solution as well as one that workers are most likely to wear all day. As a result, employers benefit from reduced recordable incidents and related costs, a more productive workforce and a visible improvement in the organization's overall safety culture.

Appears in September 2013 issue of OHS Magazine

