

news & notes

EYE ON STATS

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were nearly 21,000 eye injuries in private industry in 2014. About 14,000 were caused by contact with objects or equipment, and some 6,000 resulted from exposure to a harmful substance or condition in the environment.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) reports some 300,000 emergency room visits each year due to workplace eye injuries. Forty percent of these injuries occur in manufacturing, construction, and mining, though eye hazards are also present in offices, hospitals, laboratories, and other workplaces.

The academy cites two major reasons workers experience eye injuries on the job—either not wearing eye protection or wearing the wrong protection for the job. A BLS survey found that among workers who suffered eye injuries, nearly three out of five were not wearing eye protection at the time of the incident.

Every day, nearly 2,000 American workers suffer the pain of avoidable workplace eye injuries that require medical treatment.



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Eye on safety

Take precautions to protect your eyes

According to The Vision Council, a nonprofit trade association, 90 percent of eye injuries are preventable, and vision loss is among the top 10 disabilities for American adults. The Council identifies four primary causes of eye injuries:

1. **Projectiles** (dust, concrete, metal, wood, and other particles);
2. **Chemicals** (splashes and fumes);
3. **Radiation** (especially visible light, ultraviolet (UV) radiation, heat, or infrared radiation and lasers); *and*
4. **Bloodborne pathogens** (hepatitis or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)) from bodily fluids, including blood.

The first line of defense against eye hazards is protective eyewear. Choose personal protective equipment (PPE) based on a hazard assessment of each activity. Options include:

- **Nonprescription and prescription safety glasses.** While they may look like regular glasses, safety eyewear features much stronger lenses and frames. Safety glasses must meet ANSI standards, indicated by a Z87 mark on the lens or frame. They provide protection for general working conditions where dust, chips, or flying particles may be present. Side shields or wraparound glasses provide additional side protection. Polycarbonate lenses are considered the most protective.
- **Goggles.** Safety goggles protect from impact, dust, and chemical splash. They provide a secure shield around the entire eye and guard against hazards coming from any direction. Goggles can be worn over prescription glasses and contact lenses.
- **Face shields and helmets.** A face shield protects the entire face of a worker exposed to severe chemical hazards, heat, or bloodborne pathogens and is worn over safety glasses or goggles. A helmet is used for welding or working with molten materials.
- **Special protection.** Other types of protection, such as helmets or goggles with special filters to protect the eyes from radiation exposure, are used for tasks like welding or when working with lasers. Full-face respirators are ideal for protection from hazards like sanding dust, paint spray, and other respiratory irritants.

NOTE: While contact lenses do not safeguard against hazards, the improvement in vision they provide can have a positive impact on safety. The American Optometric Association explains, "Contact lenses can't provide significant protection from eye hazards in the workplace. However, there is no evidence that the wearing of contact lenses increases the risk of eye injury."

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CRASH COURSE ON COSTS

Motor vehicle crash injuries cost employers \$47.4 billion in 2013, according to the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), which published *The Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers*.

Motor vehicle crashes killed more than 1,600 people and injured 239,000 while they were working. NETS says this total amounts to about 7.5 percent of all crash injuries. More than half the injuries forced people to miss work.

A quarter of the \$47 billion total in expenses resulted from off-the-job injuries to workers and their dependents. Property damage, workplace disruption, and liability costs accounted for \$20.6 billion, and the remaining millions went toward benefit payments, including sick leave, health insurance, and insurance covering work losses.

Employers paid \$6 billion to cover the cost of motor vehicle crashes in which at least one driver was alcohol-impaired. Employers' crash-related costs were highest in California, Florida, New York, and Texas. As for industry, costs per employee were highest in metal manufacturing; agriculture, forestry, and fishing; and transportation.



The ABCs of LOTO

Follow lockout/tagout procedures to stay safe

Every year, between 150 and 200 fatalities and some 50,000 injuries occur due to failure to control the release of hazardous energy. Lockout/tagout (LOTO) refers to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) required practices and procedures to protect workers from unexpected start-up of machinery or hazardous energy released during service or maintenance.

LOTO consistently appears on OSHA's annual list of most-violated standards. OSHA maintains that compliance with the standard (29 CFR 1910.147) could prevent hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries, including amputations, each year.

OSHA requires that equipment be locked or tagged out of service when there is a chance for injury from energized equipment during servicing or maintenance. Workers may not attempt to operate switches, valves, or other controls once a device is locked or tagged. An authorized person must turn off and disconnect equipment from its energy source during service or maintenance.

Locks, tags, and other methods prevent those who are unauthorized from reenergizing equipment. Lockout devices hold energy-isolating equipment in a safe or off position. They prevent equipment from becoming energized because no one can remove them without a key or other unlocking mechanism. Tagout items are prominent warning devices fastened to energy-isolating controls to warn employees not to reenergize the equipment. Tagout devices are easier to remove and, on their own, are considered less protective than lockout devices.

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Stay 'safe for life'

Take the National Safety Month theme to heart

"Safe for Life" is the theme of this year's **National Safety Month** (NSM) observance (www.nsc.org/act/events/Pages/national-safety-month.aspx). NSM is sponsored by the National Safety Council (NSC) every June and "focuses on reducing leading causes of injury and death at work, on the roads and in our homes and communities."

The NSC acknowledges that commitment from top leadership is essential. But equally important is a culture in which safety is owned by all, making everyone in the organization a safety leader.

As the NSM website says, "Safety is no accident. It's a choice we need to make throughout our entire lives." This declaration is true, whether you're at work or at home, on the road, or in your own backyard. Always choose the safe way.

Weekly themes for this year's NSM are:

- Week 1: Stand Ready to Respond
- Week 2: Be Healthy
- Week 3: Watch Out for Dangers
- Week 4: Share Roads Safely

Visit the website listed above during each week in June to get free and/or exclusive NSC membership materials on each weekly topic.