Safety Scene

The Eyes Have It

by Molly E. Butz & Brooke Kutz

Eye injuries in the truss plant are preventable with common sense and the right equipment.

The old saying goes, "to learn about eye protection, ask someone who has one." And, although the play on words is, indeed, humorous, an eye injury is anything but funny. The good news is that appropriate eye protection combined with proper training can help you and your employees prevent an estimated 90 percent of workplace eye injuries.

American workplaces encounter roughly 1,000 eye injuries every day.* More staggering are the financial implications of these injuries, which total more than "$300 million per year in lost production time, medical expenses, and workers compensation costs."* And let's be honest, no monetary value can be placed on a person's vision.

Evaluate

In order to prevent costly eye injuries at your component manufacturing facility, you'll need to begin by assessing the various operations and areas of production. Prevent Blindness America, a national volunteer eye health and safety organization, suggests that you "inspect all work areas, access routes, and equipment for hazards to eyes."

Appropriate eye protection combined with proper training can help prevent an estimated 90 percent of workplace eye injuries.

The majority of job-related eye injuries result from flying particles or falling objects that strike or scrape the eye. For a component manufacturer, examples of these include metal and wood slivers, wood chips, sawdust, nails and staples. Any of these can result in reduced vision or even worse: an injured worker can experience permanent vision loss if the eyeball is penetrated. In addition, chemical burns to the eyes from contact with industrial chemicals or cleaning products are also common causes of eye injuries.

You will be able to eliminate a certain number of eye hazards immediately by installing and using appropriate machine guarding. In addition, it's common sense to take a certain amount of caution in any manufacturing environment, and that includes a component manufacturing plant. A Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) survey found that of about 1,000 employees who sustained a minor eye injury, over half were employed in manufacturing.*

Select

Next, you'll need to select the proper eye protection for your facility and the various jobs that are conducted in your plant. The BLS survey reported that the number one factor contributing to eye injuries was "not wearing eye protection"* and the runner up was "wearing the wrong kind of eye protection for the job."* Further, the survey concluded "nearly three out of every five workers injured were not wearing eye protection at the time of the accident,"* while 40 percent of the workers who were wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) were wearing

*"Eye Protection in the Workplace" Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) Fact Sheet

Continued on page 20

at a glance

- ❑ American workplaces log roughly 1,000 eye injuries every day.*
- ❑ The majority of job-related eye injuries result from flying particles or falling objects that strike or scrape the eye. For a component manufacturer, examples include metal and wood slivers, wood chips, sawdust, nails and staples.
- ❑ Invest in comfortable and adjustable eye protection and train employees on its proper maintenance and replacement.

Safety Scene

Continued from page 18

the wrong kind.

There are various types of eye protection to select from: non-prescription and prescription safety glasses, goggles, face shields, welding helmets and full-face respirators. For the most part, one of the first two choices will protect your employees from the hazards present at a component manufacturing facility. However, keep in mind that there may be circumstances that call for more protection than safety glasses or goggles.

When you're selecting eye protection, be sure to consider all of the hazards that may affect your employees' eyes throughout the day. It's important to make sure the eye protection does not increase or create other health or safety hazards. In addition, ask your employees if the eye protection fits comfortably or choose a style that can be adjusted. Like most PPE, if the eye protection chosen is uncomfortable, employees are less likely to wear it regularly—if at all.

Don't hesitate to spend the money it takes to get useful, comfortable eye protection. The average eye injury costs $3,600; that's enough cash to buy eye protection for roughly 100 employees! And, if it means your employees will use it, it's worth it in the long run.

Train

Once you've established the type of eye protection you'll be using, conduct thorough trainings with small groups of employees. Goggles or safety glasses may seem like fairly simple pieces of personal protective equipment, but your employees still need to understand how they should fit. This will also give you the opportunity to talk about maintenance and replacement issues, as damaged personal protective equipment will not serve its purpose and should be fixed or replaced. It will also open the feedback channel for employees regarding their eye protection concerns.

All in Favor, Say EYE!

Most importantly, teach your employees to be aware of their environment at all times and that they must wear their eye protection whenever there is any chance of an eye hazard. After all, wearing the proper eye protection is very best way to protect you and your employees from potential eye injuries in the workplace. And don't forget to make your component manufacturing facility visitors don a pair of safety glasses, too. Safety First! SBC

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@sbcindustry.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at www.wtcatko.com.

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