

## **WORKPLACE EYE SAFETY TALKING POINTS**

- More than 800,000 work-related eye injuries occur annually. (Healthy People 2010).
- In 2007, there were 33,010 occupational injuries to the eyes that required time away from work. (U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics).
- Production jobs reported the most eye injuries, followed by jobs in the installation, maintenance and repair industries.
- Those aged 25-34 reported the most eye injuries. And, 26,200 of workplace eye injuries were to men.
- Chemical burns, followed by cuts, lacerations or punctures were the most common eye injuries. Chemicals and chemical products was the number one source of eye injury followed by parts and materials, and hand tools.
- More eye accidents at work happen on Tuesday than any other day of the week and between the hours of 8 a.m. and noon.
- According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, healthcare workers, laboratory staff, janitorial workers, animal handlers, and other workers may be at risk of acquiring infectious diseases via ocular exposure. Infectious diseases can be transmitted through the mucous membranes of the eye as a result of direct exposure (e.g., blood splashes, respiratory droplets generated during coughing or suctioning) or from touching the eyes with contaminated fingers or other objects. The infections may result in relatively minor conjunctivitis or reddening/soreness of the eye or in a life threatening disease such as HIV, B virus, or possibly even avian influenza.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to ensure the safety of all employees in the work environment. Eye and face protection must be provided whenever necessary to protect against chemical, environmental, radiological or mechanical irritants and hazards.
- As of 2003, the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that eye injuries total more than \$300 million a year in lost production time, medical expenses and worker compensation.
- 90 percent of all eye injuries can be prevented by wearing the proper protective eyewear.
- Only eye protection that has been certified by the American National Standards Institute should be used and must have "ANSI Z87" clearly stamped on the frame or lens.

- In 1948, Prevent Blindness America (then the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness) launched the Wise Owl Club of America, the industrial eye safety incentive program promoting the use of protective eyewear.

## **TEN SAFETY TIPS IN THE WORKPLACE**

**ASSESS!** Look carefully at plant operations. Inspect work areas, access routes and equipment. Study eye accident and injury reports. Identify operations and areas that present eye hazards.

**TEST!** Uncorrected vision problems can cause accidents. Use vision testing in your employee pre-placement and routine physical examinations.

**PROTECT!** Select protective eyewear designed for a specific duty or hazard. Protective eyewear must meet the current standards referenced by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 and later revisions.

**PARTICIPATE!** For maximum protection against eye injuries, establish a 100 percent mandatory program that requires eye protection in all operation areas of your plant. Experience shows this kind of program prevents more injuries and is easier to enforce than one limited to certain departments, areas or jobs.

**FIT!** Workers cannot be expected to use their protective eyewear unless it fits well and is comfortable. To ensure that eyewear is adequate, have it fitted by an eye care professional or someone trained to do this. Provide the means for repair of eyewear and require each worker to be responsible for his or her own gear.

**PLAN FOR AN EMERGENCY!** Establish first-aid procedures for eye injuries. Make eyewash stations accessible, especially where chemicals are used. Train workers in basic first aid and identify those with more advanced first-aid training.

**EDUCATE!** Conduct ongoing educational programs to establish, maintain and reinforce the need for protective eyewear. Add eye safety to your regular employee education/training programs and include it as a part of a new employee orientation.

**SUPPORT!** Management support is key to having a successful eye safety program. Management should all set an example by wearing protective eyewear whenever and wherever needed.

**REVIEW!** Continually review and, when needed, revise your accident prevention policies. The goal should be to have NO eye injuries or accidents!

**PUT IT IN WRITING!** When all parts of your safety program have been created, put them in writing. Display a copy of the policy in areas where workers go, and include a review of the policy in new employee orientation.