



The eyes have it

Eye protection can save your vision – even your life. Here's what you need to know.

By Gina Lego

Safety eyewear is an essential piece of personal protective equipment, but all too often workers wear the wrong kind or, even worse, don't wear it at all.

The statistics are startling. In the five-year period ending 2004, WorkSafeBC accepted more than 9,200 short-term and long-term disability claims (excluding health care and rehabilitation costs) related to workplace eye injuries, at a cost of more than \$28 million.

Types of protection

Conducting a worksite assessment is the first step in determining the correct fit between eye protection needs and job conditions. Whether a worker is exposed to flying particles from drilling or scaling, UVA/UVB rays, welding light and electrical arcs, or even bloodborne pathogens, each worksite

is unique and will require careful selection of proper eye protectors.

Safety glasses provide minimum protection and are for general working conditions where dust, chips, or flying particles may present a hazard. They are available in a variety of styles and provide side protection in the form of shields or wraparound arms. Lenses should have an anti-fog treatment.

Goggles provide higher impact, dust, and acid or chemical splash protection than safety glasses. Molded goggles, like those used for skiing, are suitable when workers are continually exposed to splash or fine dust, and should have indirect venting. For less fogging when working with large particles, direct-vent goggles are recommended.

Face shields protect the full face from injury and they offer

the highest impact protection and shelter from spraying, chipping, grinding, chemicals, and bloodborne hazards. A face shield is considered a secondary safeguard to protective eyewear; it should never be worn without safety glasses or goggles.

Proper fit is critical

In order to get the maximum benefit from safety eyewear, individuals should be test fitted and assigned a personal set of protective eyewear, then instructed on its care and maintenance. As with any personal item, safety eyewear is more likely to be used if it offers the right look and fit for the individual.

“One of the key factors in getting workers to wear safety eyewear is to offer a choice of styles that suits their individual needs,” says Kevin Birnie, WorkSafeBC (WCB) occupational safety officer. “People have a real preference for the type of eye protection they wear.”

Darren Giesbrecht, shop foreman at the Oakmont Industries Division of Guardian Building Products in Surrey, agrees. “Our workers are offered a choice of about six different styles. If we don’t supply a style they like, we’ll reimburse them for one of their own choosing.”

Don’t take it off

Choosing the right safety eyewear is important, but remember it can’t protect you if you’re not wearing it.

“Accidents happen when and where you least expect,” says Ken Kirby, a WorkSafeBC engineer. “We often see eye injuries occurring outside of a worker’s usual workspace – not where the obvious hazards exist. For example, a worker will take off his protective eyewear to do a job in another area, and that’s when the accident occurs.

That’s why Kirby feels workers can never be too careful. “Employers are encouraged to consider a general policy where workers are required to wear their protective eyewear at all times while on a worksite.”

Eye safety resources

For more information, contact your WorkSafeBC officer, call the WorkSafe Call Centre at 604 276-3100, toll-free at 1 888 621-7233, or visit the following web sites:

- Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Part 8: Eye and face protection <http://regulation.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/Part8.asp#SectionNumber:8.14>
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, Safety Glasses and Face Protectors www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/prevention/ppe/glasses.html



Close encounter with a 3.5-inch spike

Wade Harding, an ironworker with B.I.D. Construction Ltd. in Vanderhoof, learned first-hand the importance of wearing safety glasses when a 9-centimetre (3.5-inch) spike from an airnailing gun ricocheted off a board and pierced the lens of his safety glasses, grazing his eyelid.

“I was holding a board down while the carpenter nailed it into place using an airnailing gun. One minute I’m holding down a bent 2x4 piece of lumber, a split-second later I’m falling back with a spike stuck through my safety glasses.

“My vision was blurry for a couple of hours, but after getting the thumbs-up from a hospital visit, I went back to work and finished off my shift. If I hadn’t been wearing the eye protection, I would have lost my eye – or worse.”

Good safety habits paid big dividends that day, and good training helped too. Just one week into his new job with B.I.D., Harding was one of many working on a \$105-million sawmill expansion project in Vanderhoof. All new hires must successfully complete a half-day B.I.D. Construction core safety program before they’re allowed on the job site.

