Safety Footwear Meeting Kit

FOOTWEAR IN GENERAL

Protecting employees' feet with good industrial footwear cuts lost work hours, improves productivity, and heightens morale and reduces injuries.

HAZARDS ASSESSMENT

A good safety footwear program begins not with selecting a new pair of shoes or boots, but by addressing all of the walking and working surfaces that employees are going to be exposed to and assuring that they are in the best condition possible. In the **hazard assessment process**, safety and health managers should consider the kinds of operations within a facility, the processes being used, the tasks being performed, environmental conditions and the nature of any chemicals in use. They also have to examine **"key human performance factors,"** such as the fit of footwear or whether the foot will sweat profusely.

COMMON HAZARDS AND DANGERS

- Materials handled or used by the worker.
- Any material or equipment that might roll over the feet.
- Sharp or pointed objects that might cut the top of the feet.
- Objects that may penetrate the bottom or side of the foot.
- Risk of damage to sensitive electronic components or equipment due to the discharge of static electricity.
- Risk of coming into contact with energized conductors of low to moderate voltage (e.g., 220 volts or less).
- Type of walking surface and environmental conditions workers may be exposed to (e.g., loose ground cover, smooth surfaces, temperature, wet/oily, chemicals, etc.).

QUALITIES OF SAFETY FOOTWEAR

- The inner side of the shoe must be straight from the heel to the end of the big toe.
- The shoe must grip the heel firmly.
- The forepart must allow freedom of movement for the toes.
- The shoe must have a fastening across the instep to prevent the foot from slipping when walking.
- The shoe must have a low, wide-based heel; flat shoes are recommended.
- The shoe should have a low, wide-based heel. Small heels (1/4” to 1/3” for a men size 9, scaled to other sizes) are recommended.

ADVICE IN BUYING WORK FOOTWEAR

- Do not expect that footwear which is too tight will stretch with wear.
- Have both feet measured when buying shoes. Feet normally differ in size.
- Buy shoes to fit the bigger foot.
- Buy shoes late in the afternoon when feet are likely to be swollen to their maximum size.
- Ask a doctor’s advice if properly fitting shoes are not available.
- Consider using shock-absorbing insoles where the job requires walking or standing on hard floors.

KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING FOOT PROTECTION:

- Footwear with ankle protection prevents sparks and burning particles from getting inside a worker’s shoes. Elastic makes it easy for workers to remove their shoes in an emergency.
- Waterproof footwear in wet conditions. Shoes and boots that protect against heat and cold.

- Footwear with good traction to prevent slips and falls. Some workers may need to wear cleats, or shoes with an abrasive, gritted, grooved, spiked or studded sole.
- Shoes made of rubber, PVC or neoprene protect against spills of oil, animal fat and chemicals. Select the proper material to protect against exposure from chemicals and other caustic materials.
- Footwear with guards protects feet against falling objects. The guards are made of steel, plastic or fiber and protect the top of the foot from falling objects.
- Protect the bottom of your feet from cuts, stabs and needle punctures. Shoes with reinforced soles made of a special flexible metal protect against cuts and punctures from sharp objects such as needles, nails and broken glass.
- Workers exposed to electrical hazards need footwear with special soles to protect against shocks.
- Hygiene slippers and sandals are great for employees who shower before they leave work. Disposable footwear prevents the spread of infection.

FIT AND CARE BASICS OF SAFETY FOOTWEAR

Fit:

- Try on new boots around midday. Feet normally swell during the day.
- Walk in new footwear to ensure it is comfortable.
- Boots should have ample toe room. Do not expect footwear to stretch with wear.
- Make allowances for extra socks or special arch supports when buying boots. Try on your new boots with the supports or socks you usually wear at work.
- Boots should fit snugly around the heel and ankle when laced.
- Lace up boots fully. High-cut boots provide support against ankle injury.

Care:

- Use a protective coating to make footwear water-resistant.
- Inspect footwear regularly for damage (e.g., cracks in soles, breaks in leather, or exposed toe caps).
- Repair or replace worn or defective footwear.
- Electric shock resistance of footwear is greatly reduced by wet conditions and with wear.
- Footwear exposed to sole penetration or impact may not have visible signs of damage.

FINAL WORD

Protecting feet and ankles from injuries involve selecting and wearing the proper footwear according to task and hazards. In general, it is a good idea to always use CSA-approved safety footwear. It’s also important to select the right footwear for conditions and the task.