Save Face – And Your Eyes

Safety Talk

The need for face and eye protection in the workplace is highlighted by eye doctors. The American Academy of Ophthalmology warns that even leisure-time yard work can permanently injure or blind, by one careless moment.

It’s a wakeup call for workers who do jobs hazardous to face and eyes—not just on weekends but all week. Meanwhile the eye care experts remind people to use protective eyewear even while working on the lawn at home. Often people are injured while using common power tools such as weed trimmers and lawnmowers. Sticks, stones, nails and pieces of cord from weed trimmers have caused permanent eye injuries.

Forestry and horticultural workers should remember that power tools are not the only cause of face and eye injuries. Eye doctors say even dirt in the eyes can cause infections. More painful is the eye condition caused by sap or oils from certain plants, or ulcers caused by fungus introduced into eyes by plant material.

Every day about 1,000 employees have their eyes injured at workplaces in the United States. Many of those workers are not wearing eye protection.

These are common eye hazards in the workplace:

- Impact from flying objects ranging from large chips to particles of sand and dirt is a hazard, if your job involves machining, grinding, chipping, sawing, drilling, riveting, chiseling, power fastening or masonry work.
- Extreme heat is a danger to eyes and faces of furnace operators or to those who pour, cast and weld. A spark from a furnace could hit your eye.
- Chemicals—splashed or in vapors and irritating mists—are hazards in degreasing or plating and other jobs.

- Harmful dust can be a problem for those who work with wood, buff materials or spend time in any dusty conditions.
- Optical radiation comes from the sun, glare or the intense light during welding, soldering, brazing or while using a cutting torch or laser.

Here are a few tips for eye and face safety:

- Make sure personal protective equipment (PPE) such as goggles and faceshields fit properly.
- Wear the recommended glasses with sideshields when around chemicals or flying objects that could go around or underneath the glasses.
- Keep eye PPE clean and clear of scratches.
- Wear goggles with indirect ventilation when chemicals might splash you.
- If you need to touch your face or eyes, wash hands first.
- Know how to find the emergency eyewash station, even with blurred vision.
- Don’t rub the dirt in your eye. Use an eyewash. If the particle doesn’t wash out, lightly bandage the eye and get medical aid.
- Seek emergency medical help for a punctured eye. Don’t try to remove the fragment. Bandage the eye without applying pressure.

Wear your safety gear. Protective equipment for face and eyes can prevent injuries or make them less serious than they would have been.