Toolbox Talks

Safety Month

March is Eye Safety at Work Month!

Eye injuries on the job are very common. So common that The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) reports about 2,000 U.S. job-related eye injuries that require medical treatment each day. Of these,
10-20% will be disabling because of temporary or permanent vision loss.
There are many facets of eye wellness, from avoiding eye injury, to proper care for contacts, & even cosmetic eye care. One important topic to cover is eyestrain, which many of us deal with daily. Eyestrain occurs when your eyes get tired from intense use, such as driving a car for extended periods, reading, or working at a computer.
Although eyestrain can be annoying, it usually isn't serious & goes away once you rest your eyes. In some cases, signs & symptoms of eyestrain can indicate an underlying eye condition that needs treatment. Although you may not be able to change the nature of your job or all the factors that can cause eyestrain, you can take steps to reduce eyestrain.

Symptoms:

- Sore, tired, burning, or itching eyes
- Watery eyes
- Dry eyes
- Blurred or double vision
- Sore neck & back
- Shoulder pain
- Increased sensitivity to light

Computer use can cause additional eyestrain symptoms, including:

- Having trouble shifting your focus between monitor & paper documents
- Seeing color fringes or afterimages when you look away from the monitor

Causes:

- Extended use of a computer or video monitor
- Reading for extended periods
- Other activities involving extended periods of intense focus & concentration, such as using a microscope or driving a vehicle
- Exposure to bright light or glare
- Straining to see in very dim light

Using a computer for long periods is one of the most common causes of eyestrain. This type of eyestrain is called computer vision syndrome. In some cases, an underlying eye problem such as eye muscle imbalance or uncorrected vision can cause or worsen computer eyestrain.

Prevention:

- Take eye breaks. Throughout the day, give your eyes a break by forcing them to focus on something other than on your computer screen. A good rule of thumb is to follow the 20/20/20 rule: Every 20 minutes, take your eyes off your computer & look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.Try to stand up & move around at least once every hour or so. If possible, lean back & close your eyes for a few moments.
- Get appropriate eyewear. If you wear glasses or contacts, make sure the correction is right for computer work. Most lenses are fitted for reading print & may not be optimal for computer work. Glasses or contact lenses designed specifically for computer work may be a worthwhile investment.
- Blink often to refresh your eyes. Many people blink less than normal when working at a computer, so dry eyes can result from prolonged computer use.
- Consider using artificial teardrops, which can help prevent & relieve dry eyes that result from prolonged sessions at the computer. Lubricating drops that don't contain preservatives can be used as often as you need.
- Improve the air quality in your workspace. Try using a humidifier, turning down the thermostat, & avoiding smoke.
- Massage your eyelids & muscles over your brow, temple, & upper cheek once or twice daily. This process can stimulate your tear glands, which may help prevent dry eyes. Massaging the muscles in the area around your eye (orbit) also helps relax those muscles, which may reduce some of the symptoms of eyestrain.

Eye Safety at a Glance

The majority of the 2000 daily reported eye-related injuries are a result of a small particle, such as metal slivers, wood chips, dust, cement chips, etc., being ejected by tools, wind-blown or falling from above a worker (Eye Safety, CDC). Other eye hazards include smoke, chemicals (fuels, solvents, acids, etc.), welding light, & blood borne pathogens.
Preventing these eye injuries involves workers having & utilizing the correct PPE, Personal Protective Equipment, which often times is not the case. Workers may be wearing PPE that does not protect them against all of the hazards they face or they may not have been shown how to properly use the PPE.
The selection of safety glasses, goggles, face shields, etc. varies by task, nature of the hazard, potential exposure, & personal vision needs. To be effective, any equipment chosen should fit the person properly & be adjustable. Completing a hazard assessment of each activity should be done prior to the selection & ordering of the equipment. Evaluating safety hazards at the employees' primary site of work & nearby areas are the first steps that should be taken to identify which PPE best suits the situations encountered. Verify that all hazards have been minimized & any existing safety features (for example, machine guards) are in place & being utilized is key to removing or reducing the potential for eye injuries.
Conduct one-on-one or group training on the selected PPE to inform employees of not only how to wear it, but also when to use it. Many employees are unaware of how to use the PPE, but most do not know for which tasks they should be using safety glasses versus donning safety goggles & a face shield. Take time to verify that everyone who is being offered the PPE understands how to best utilize the equipment for their situation.

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