



# EASY ON THE EYES:

GETTING WORKERS TO EMBRACE EYE PROTECTION

AN ERGODYNE WHITE PAPER

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## EASY ON THE EYES: GETTING WORKERS TO EMBRACE EYE PROTECTION

### // DRESS THE PART

Everyone loves a hero. It's natural to emulate those we admire on the athletic field, in public service, or in our personal lives. Fans spend millions on replica jerseys for their favorite teams and players. "FDNY" t-shirts were everywhere after 9/11. And movie stars? Well, they just have to wear something once to make it a must-have accessory. This is money willingly spent to make a statement, to belong, and to identify with those whom we respect.

Why should safety be any different?

Nobody wants to get hurt. Yet every year, tens of thousands of employees get injured at work, costing billions of dollars.<sup>1</sup> One of the most common body parts to be injured on the job is the eye, costing employers an average of \$1,463 per injury<sup>2</sup> as well as having potentially lifelong consequences for the injured worker. Indeed, "eye injuries alone cost more than \$300 million per year in lost production time, medical expenses, and worker compensation."<sup>3</sup>

Some of the causes of these injuries are complex. Some could be prevented by simply wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) like safety glasses. So why is it so hard to get workers to wear something that is so good for them? Surveys provide fairly consistent insight on why workers "forget" to wear basic PPE<sup>4</sup> and it is helpful to consider each of these objections.

- » Belief that PPE is not needed
- » Uncomfortable to wear
- » Poor fit
- » Too hot
- » Blamed for decreased productivity or an inability to perform tasks
- » Unattractive
- » Unavailable near the work or task

A comprehensive eye safety program always starts with a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) or Job Safety Analysis (JSA).<sup>5</sup> This identifies the specific hazards of the task or workplace, and the protection required. Engineering controls are the first line of defense, along with training and awareness, but it is hard to eliminate the need for basic eye protection in most manufacturing, assembly, construction, or processing workplaces. Consider these startling statistics:

- » "Each day, about 2,000 U.S. workers have a job-related eye injury that requires medical treatment."<sup>6</sup>
- » "... every day, 700 Canadian workers sustain eye injuries on the job, often resulting in lost time and, in some cases, either temporary or permanent vision loss."<sup>7</sup>
- » "According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 20,000 workplace eye injuries happen each year. Injuries on the job often require one or more missed work days for recovery."<sup>8</sup>

### // A LEGIT FIT

No one wants to wear pants that don't fit, or shoes that dig into their feet. It's uncomfortable and distracting. Why should PPE – such as safety glasses – be any different? We expect workers to have different sized and shaped feet, and know that one size shoe or boot does not fit all. The same thing applies to their faces. Different facial sizes or shapes may be linked to factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc.

Fit may go beyond the width of the frame and length of the temples, and also include the design or shape of the frame, design of the nosepiece, and more. Glasses that are either too loose or glasses that pinch are distracting. Glasses that fit will be more comfortable to wear, and are more likely to be worn, without constant reminders or monitoring.

### // LIFT THE FOG

Assuming they stay on, glasses that fog up or provide poor optical quality may interfere with work. Of course, an eye injury will stop work too! But pausing to constantly wipe off fog in humid environments can be a distraction. And scratches, glare, and optical distortions can limit effective vision.

Depending on the hazards identified, minimum requirements for safety eye wear typically focus on protection against:

- » Impact
- » Particulates
- » Splashes
- » Ultra-violet (UV) or other types of harmful light



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Higher quality safety eyewear exceeds these minimums and offers productivity-enhancing features and upgrades, including: a scratch-resistant lens coating, inherent anti-fog technology; polarized, reflective, or tinted lenses that filter environmental light; and optical quality with little to no distortion. In fact, selection of the right lens can control glare, improve visibility, and increase edge detection on par with a pair of expensive sunglasses.

### **// COOL DRIVES COMPLIANCE**

Appearance and attractiveness are highly personal, subjective perspectives. In addition to fit, certain styles of eyewear may complement particular facial shapes or project certain images that allow employees to be recognized as individuals.

Having a variety of frames available to choose from makes this easier, and allows employees to share ownership in their selection. If a different color frame or lens choice makes someone feel better about wearing safety glasses – for example, if a camo pattern appeals to part of their personality – this can take safety glasses from something they have to wear, to something they want to wear; a critical difference. And if glasses are worn, the risk of injury to an unprotected eye is reduced. It's that simple.

The real test is whether workers continue to wear the glasses in locations where they technically aren't required, such as lunchrooms, offices, and parking lots, or if they remove them as soon as possible. This can also extend beyond the workplace to weekend activities that also pose an eye injury hazard.

### **// NO SKIMPING**

The personal part of PPE is key. Consider the difference in attitudes toward disposable – i.e., single-use visitor glasses tossed in a bin at the entrance of a production area – and a pair of high-quality safety glasses issued to an employee with a case, lanyard, and cleaning accessories. Most workers will appreciate the difference, and understand their responsibility to keep and maintain the latter as part of their job.

Some companies will take this a step further and encourage employees to take the glasses home with them as part of 24-hour safety, since an eye injury mowing the lawn, for example, can keep a skilled and experienced employee off the job for several days, even if it is not a direct workers' compensation cost for the employer.

### **// A CULTURE THAT CARES**

A strong safety culture is about more than just pithy slogans on worksite posters. It requires members of management to model the same practices that they expect from line employees, including the same type and quality PPE that they wear. If done consistently, this becomes as automatic and natural as selecting the clothes we wear to work.

Safety culture can also be expressed by the quality of PPE, including protective eyewear that is provided or offered, recognizing the value and the variety of people involved, as well as the tasks performed. This does not have to be expensive, and can be quite a value compared to the cost of a single injury, rather than considering only the purchase cost to achieve minimal compliance.

### **// ASPIRATIONAL SAFETY**

High quality PPE projects a professional image of employees and their employers. It can also inspire pride, confidence, and a feeling of being valued and respected in workers. Safety glasses are a perfect case in point.

All eye protection must address the specific hazards of the workplace, and should meet minimum industry and regulatory standards. Going beyond the minimum is an investment in the workforce, with payback in avoiding the costs of common, easily preventable injuries. It demonstrates a commitment to quality, to safety, and the value of individual workers.

When safety glasses are both stylish and safe, workers look good, feel good, and remain protected. Whether at the workplace or during the weekend, they wear them because they want to. Others may even notice their sweet specs. Sports stars, firefighters, and actors don't have to be the only trend-setters out there, you know.



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### // RESOURCES

1. Business Case for Safety and Health - OSHA  
<https://www.osha.gov/dcsp/products/topics/businesscase/costs.html>
  2. OSHA Safety and Health Management  
[https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth/mod1\\_costs.html](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth/mod1_costs.html)
  3. Eye and Face Protection  
<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/eyefaceprotection/>
  4. Alarming Number of Workers Fail to Wear Required Protective Equipment  
<http://investor.kimberly-clark.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=712258>
  5. Job Hazard Analysis - OSHA 3071  
<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3071.pdf>
  6. Eye Safety - NIOSH <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/eye/>
  7. CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind)  
<http://www.cnib.ca/en/your-eyes/safety/at-work/Pages/default.aspx>
  8. American Academy of Ophthalmology  
<http://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/injuries-work>
- Preventing Eye Injuries American Academy of Ophthalmology  
<http://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/preventing-injuries>
- Eye Safety at Work - Prevent Blindness.Org  
<http://www.preventblindness.org/eye-safety-work>



## MAKE THE WORKPLACE A BETTERPLACE.™

### THIS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THE END OF THE ROAD, DEAR FRIEND.

Now that you've read our white paper on the importance of cool, quality eye protection, check out our [full lineup of Skullerz® Safety Glasses](#). And get ready to cross compliance off your list of workday worries.

### MORE QUESTIONS?

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