

U.S. Workers Risk Eye Injuries by Not Wearing Required Protection

ROSWELL, Ga., Sept. 24, 2012 - On-the-job eye injuries can have devastating consequences, such as chemical burns or blindness. Despite these potential hazards, 85 percent of industrial workers in a Kimberly-Clark Professional survey released today said they had observed others failing to wear eye protection when they should have been.

"This high rate of noncompliance seriously jeopardizes worker health and safety. In many instances uncomfortable eyewear or fogged lenses could be responsible," said Valona Renner-Thomas, Product Manager, Eye and Face Protection, Kimberly-Clark Professional. "The results are very disconcerting when you consider that 90 percent of eye injuries can be prevented through the use of proper protective eyewear. Enhancing eyewear practices is critical to creating Exceptional Workplaces-those that are safe, healthy and productive for all employees."

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration requires employers to provide eye and face protection to guard against chemical, environmental, radiological or mechanical irritants or hazards. Yet, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that nearly three out of five injured workers were not wearing eye protection at the time of the accident or were wearing the wrong kind of eye protection for the job.

Most Challenging PPE

The importance of eye protection was evident to survey participants. Eighty percent said they would encourage a co-worker or employee to wear eye protection if he or she were not in compliance, and 22 percent said they would report the employee to a supervisor or find a way to halt dangerous work operations until the worker complied with personal protective equipment (PPE) protocols.

In addition, eyewear came in first when respondents were asked to rank the most important PPE category for on-the-job safety. It was also deemed the "most challenging" PPE category in terms of compliance, which leads to the question: how can compliance be improved? Greater comfort and fog-free lenses could help, according to the survey results. When asked what would most improve compliance with eye protection protocols, the top choice was more comfortable eyewear-with features like flexible, comfortable nose pieces (56 percent) followed by fog-free lenses (22 percent).

Fifty-one percent of respondents also reported having been forced to wear uncomfortable eyewear or eyewear they did not like while at work. Of these, 46 percent wound up purchasing their own eye protection, while 45 percent said they "used it anyway."

Fogging was also a problem on the job, with 88 percent of respondents saying they or someone they worked with had been unable to see or complete a task properly because of fogged lenses. Forty percent of respondents said this had happened on "numerous occasions."

Off-the-Job Safety

For years now, many companies, safety professionals and organizations such as the National Safety Council have been emphasizing the importance of off-the-job as well as on-the-job safety.

Despite this, only a quarter of respondents said their organizations encouraged employees to take protective eyewear home, even though 84 percent of respondents said they would consider using eye protection from work as their everyday sunglasses if it was comfortable, fit well and offered UV protection.

The survey also asked about eyewear aesthetics and branding. When it comes to style, wraparound frame designs were the top choice, selected by 77 percent of respondents. When asked if they believed brand-name products were better than less-expensive copycat or knock-off items, 71 percent answered yes.

Survey Methodology

The online survey of 138 workers in manufacturing industries across the U.S., Canada and Mexico, was conducted from June 15, 2011 through July 15, 2011. All survey respondents said they were responsible for purchasing or influencing the purchase of protective eyewear or wore these products on the job. Twenty-nine percent were involved in manufacturing, engineering, product design or R&D, 13 percent were in manufacturing production, 11 percent were supervisors or shop stewards, 9 percent were safety managers or industrial hygienists, while the remaining 37 percent held other positions. Respondents were employed in the following fields: metal manufacturing, industrial manufacturing, construction/utilities, automotive, transportation equipment or other industries.

About Kimberly-Clark Professional

Kimberly-Clark Professional partners with businesses to create Exceptional Workplaces for their employees and patrons. KCP helps transform workplaces making them healthier, safer and more productive. Key brands in this segment include: Kleenex, Scott, WypAll, Kimtech, and Jackson Safety. Kimberly-Clark Professional, located in Roswell, Ga., is one of Kimberly-Clark Corporation's four business segments and can be visited on the web at www.kcprofessional.com.

About Kimberly-Clark

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