



Safety Eyewear in Focus

Type 'eye protection workplace' into Google and you'll get plenty of helpful advice on how to make claims against employers.

Given this stark reality of the potential consequences of employee's not wearing safety eyewear – it is worth taking a little time to consider just what criteria should be used in drawing up a company safety eyewear policy.

Many companies see safety eyewear as a commodity product and buy on price. This can be a big mistake. The number one criterion should be wearer comfort. Only if the safety eyewear is actually worn will it protect. Just as importantly, only if the eyewear is comfortable and can be worn all day without eyestrain will it enable workers to work productively all day long.

It is difficult to overstate this vital consideration.

Most employees appreciate the opportunity to assess something that has the potential to make their work more comfortable.

Looking at safety eyewear from this perspective and you can soon see that the small amount of money to be saved on price is insignificant compared to the gains made in productivity with a happy and productive work force.

Convenience is also a trap it is easy to fall into. It's a common mistake to assume one frame fits all. Virtually all safety lenses are clear anti-scratch. Fine for many working situations – but consider for a moment your work situation. We'll assume your main priority is impact protection.

First of all – are those safety glasses quite as good as you think they are? All relevant certification should be stamped on the lenses. But even with this reassurance

you should seek a copy of the relevant certificates. Ideally, the certification has been done in Europe by an independent authority

The general safety standard for impact protection is EN 166 1F. To achieve certification the lenses must absorb impact from the ball bearing without shattering.

The '1F' signifies that lenses will be of grade 1 optical quality. This is the same quality of lenses specified by opticians – so can be worn all day without eyestrain.

So if you are asking your workforce to wear safety eyewear which is certified as EN 166 1F – you can assure them that they should not have any visual problems – provided they are keeping their glasses clean and unscratched.

This raises another important question. How long can the same pair of safety

eyewear be worn? Properly looked after, safety eyewear can last for years. But incorrect cleaning can soon lead to scratches – and scratches can cause eyestrain and wearer discomfort.

Very few companies ask their PPE suppliers for cases or protective bags. These could add hugely to the shelf life of your eyewear on site. Making a cloth bag which doubles as a cleaning cloth available helps ensure your staff treat safety eyewear with respect. Top quality safety eyewear is the same optical quality as prescription glasses – and should be treated accordingly.

Is glare a problem in your work environment? That's glare caused by moving from dark to light environments, working under harsh fluorescent lighting, moving from indoors to outdoors etc. If any of the above is happening it can result in eyestrain – and

this is one of many areas where lens coatings can have a huge benefit.

Anybody moving from a light to a dark environment will have their visual clarity markedly improved with a gold mirror lens. This gives greatly enhanced visual perception – and allows workers to work much more effectively. Fork lift truck drivers are an obvious example... but mechanics and engineers working in poor light, then looking up to bright light – even lab workers working under fluorescent light – all will have much better vision with a gold mirror lens.

Specifying different lenses does not mean specifying different eyewear. A good safety eyewear frame will be able to take a range of lenses to ensure that all your employees are wearing the same frame.

For example – fogging can be a particular problem – especially in moving from warm to cold environments. Some frames have ventilated lenses, especially developed to reduce fogging – but a hydrophobic anti-fog lens will greatly reduce the problem.

Other specialist lenses include high contrast lenses in yellow or orange. A yellow lens can markedly increase visual acuity in flat or low light and orange lenses have a wide range of specialist applications.

Finally the number one problem faced by workers in many outdoor situations

is glare. All polycarbonate lenses should provide the added reassurance of total protection against UV radiation.

A standard grey lens will also give excellent sun protection – and just to confuse you there is another EN number to look out for – EN 172 which confirms that the lenses cut out glare adequately for all-day working. In very bright conditions – off-shore in quarries etc. even greater glare protection may be required. This is where mirror coatings on a grey lens can provide even more protection.

So that's a very brief run through all the possibilities available on the theme of basic safety eyewear. If price is the number one criterion, it is true to say that a grade 1 optical quality lens costing £2.50 will provide exactly the same level of basic eye protection as one costing £6.50. However as stated above the differences are many and varied – and can make all the difference to comfortable viewing and productive work in the work environment.

Standard safety eyewear is the 'easy' part. If cost was your number one priority here – hopefully you are now thinking more in terms of worker comfort and productivity. Now for something if not completely different – at least very different: Prescription Safety Eyewear. This is the part of your eyewear policy where convenience looms

large in your thinking.

Not only are the frames different – which brings with it the eternal problem of worker self-consciousness – there is the need to orchestrate eye tests. This raises the possibility of different prescriptions and different costs – all of which are out of your control.

An often overlooked extra cost is the optician's dispensing fees which is the charge applied for fitting the glasses. There are different lenses – do you opt for plastic, polycarbonate – or toughened glass? All these issues have to be decided – so that the only choice left for the employee is which frame is most suitable.

The good news is that there have been great strides made in prescription safety eyewear styles recently. No longer do your employees have to look like Joe 90 or Brains.

In recent years it has also become possible to provide prescription inserts that fit plano frames too – which gives employers a third option. There are two key advantages with this approach. Firstly everybody wears the same frame. The insert can fit behind a clear lens or a sun lens Secondly, if the safety spectacles are scratched or damaged – you simply throw out the £5.00 safety frame and your valuable prescription insert is simply inserted in a fresh pair of spectacles.

You also have to establish who holds the case of frames. Is it a nominated person within your company? Or the optician? There are pluses to either option. If a nominated member of your company holds the frames – then you know what is chosen before members of staff visit the optician. If the optician holds the frame – you have one less thing to worry about – is the frame set complete? Have you received all the latest styles?

The final question is price. Some companies operate a voucher scheme- though these schemes may have a fixed cost and a sell-by date. As in many things the best option is almost certainly going to be the simplest. And simply by negotiating with the supplying company you can get the best price available.

By building a relationship with the safety eyewear company and their representative you can put in place the selection of frames that are best for you – and ensure that the system works as smoothly as possible.

In conclusion, safety eyewear is far from a commodity product – and the choice of lens and style of product could make a real difference to workforce comfort and productivity.

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