

SafetyToolboxTalks

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Contact Lenses

At one time contact lenses were thought to be a danger in many work environments and while doing many tasks. Current safety thinking about contact lenses is this: Contacts are safe for use in all work environments, providing other appropriate eye protection is also used. They have even been approved for use with a respirator.

The problems which give contact lenses a bad name at work have usually turned out to be the result of over-use and failure to use protective safety eyewear.

Contacts should not be worn in any situation where they might absorb chemical vapors or trap dust. If you wear contact lenses, these tips are for you:

- Appropriate eye protection must be worn along with the contacts. Contact lenses and street eyewear are no substitute for the correct safety glasses or goggles.

- The worker should consider telling the first aid crew he wears contacts in case of an eye injury. Wallet cards identifying contact lens wearers are also a good idea.

- Bring your contact lens care kit to work in case a lens needs to be removed and cleaned. Keep an extra kit in your locker just in case.

- Keep extra set of eyeglasses at work in case the contacts have to come out because of dust in the eye or other problems.

- Follow the care program recommended by the lens provider. Smudged and dirty contacts can impair vision and lead to eye irritation and infection.

- Overwearing can cause excessive drying, leading to ulceration of the eye cornea.

- In case of a chemical splash in the eye, begin flushing the eye with water immediately and continue for 20 minutes. The lens may be washed away in this process, or a first-aider may be able to take them out while flushing continues. Call for medical help immediately.

- Sometimes an impact will knock a contact lens away from the cornea at the front of the eye and send it under an eyelid. If flushing with a clean saline solution does not work, see an eye specialist.

Fighter pilots in the Persian Gulf War found contact lenses worked better with their respirators and goggles than eyeglasses did. Their experience contributed to the new thinking about contact lenses in the workplace.