

New York State Public Entities Safety Group 497

Safety Agenda

___ Chief, Fire Department
___ Site Administrators
___ Commissioners
___ Human Resources
___ Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
___ Elected Officials

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How Good Are Your Smoke Alarms?

As of 2004, 96% of U.S. households had at least one smoke alarm. Fire deaths dropped to less than 3200 that year, down from 5865 in 1977 when few homes had alarms. Offices typically have smoke alarms today, also. Smoke alarms save lives when they are used properly.

There is some doubt today as to whether all fire alarm types respond quickly enough to burning synthetic materials in furnishings, fabrics and carpeting found in homes and offices. The doubt has arisen because of a jury award to a father and his daughter who were trapped in their home when an ionization smoke alarm allegedly failed to alert them to their danger.

Ionization alarms dominate the market for smoke alarms. Ionization alarms detect smoke with the help of radioactive material, and sound earlier in fast-burning flaming fires. The other type of alarm, photoelectric, detects changes in light patterns and sounds earlier in slow, smoky fires that take time to transition to flames.

Today's synthetics tend to smolder for a long time, then burn faster than natural materials like wood and cotton. They melt and pool, then give off substantially more energy when they burn. That shortens the time to full combustion in the entire room due to accumulated heat and gases to about 2 to 4 minutes -- hardly enough time to hear an ionization type alarm and exit the area.

The way to have the best protection from your smoke alarms at home and in the office is to have both ionization and photoelectric models in operation. The ionization alarm will detect smoke and alarm quickly, and the photoelectric alarm will

detect the smoldering fire before it grows into a conflagration. (Consumer Reports recommended this solution in 2001.)

Dangerous Distractions

According to the National Highway Safety Administration, 25 percent of the 6.3 million vehicle crashes each year involve some type of driver distraction.

It's important that drivers are aware of the dangers posed by distracted drivers encountered on the road -- and it is important that they realize that they, too can be distracted from their very important responsibilities by their own actions.

The problem is multitasking -- performing a number of other activities while behind the wheel. We have all seen women applying makeup, men shaving, even reading while driving down the road. Then there are the eaters, and the cell phone users.

A National Transportation Safety Administration study found that dialing a cell phone triples the risk of a crash or near crash, and talking or listening on a cell phone increases that risk by 130 percent. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that drivers using phones are four times as likely to get into crashes.

"Drive defensively" takes on new meaning -

- Watch out for those distracted drivers and make sure that you are free of distractions.
- Keep objects off the dashboard that could fall off during vehicle operation.
- Keep front and side windows and mirrors clear of obstructions at all times.
- Don't eat or drink while in motion: pull over to use your cell phone.

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How Good is Your Eye Safety Program?

About 2,000 eye injuries occur every day in the U.S. Even “minor” eye injuries can cause life-long vision problems and suffering -- a simple scratch from sawdust can cause corneal erosion that is recurrently painful. Hammering on metal that gives off metal slivers and the rebounding of an ordinary nail are two common causes of vision loss among construction workers and do-it-yourselfers.

Hammering, grinding, sanding and masonry work produce particles that are harmful to the eye. Chemicals can splash into the eye. Cement can even cause a chemical burn. Dusty or windy conditions can leave particles in the eye, as can the actions of co-workers. You can get an eye injury just from passing through an area where work is being performed.

How good is your eye safety program?

Check the following:

- Do all workers in dangerous areas wear the proper safety glasses at all times?
- Does safety eyewear have “Z87” or “Z87+” marked on the frame and/or the lens?
- Does the eyewear have adequate side protection?
- Are machine guards that prevent the escape of particles in place at all times?
- Are welding curtains for arc flash protection always used when welding operations are being conducted?
- Are operations areas placed off limits to those not involved in dusty or welding operations?
- Are goggles (which are stronger than safety glasses) used for higher impact protection, greater particle protection, chemical splashes, and welding light protection?
- Are faceshields used for spraying, chipping and grinding?
- Are welding helmets used for all arc welding?
- Are safety goggles or glasses always worn under welding helmets?
- Is there a process for checking the fit of safety glasses to make sure that they fit snugly against the face and do not slide down the nose? (The biggest gaps are usually near the corners of the glasses. The bigger the gap, the more exposure to hazards from a slight angle or above.)
- Do all staff members know where to obtain safety eyewear, and assistance in fitting it?
- Are safety glasses stored carefully to protect against scratching?
- Do workers take off their safety eyewear ONLY when they have left the site and are out of the hazard zone?
- Do the safety glasses have anti-fog coatings put on during manufacturing, or are an anti-fog solution and clean cloths made available for cleaning lenses?
- Is there a written policy on safety eyewear use? Is it posted in appropriate places? Are enforcement processes included, and are they consistently enforced?
- Do supervisors model safety eyewear use at all times, and enforce the rules for all?

