

BEST FOOT FORWARD!

A PROGRAMMED APPROACH TO FOOT PROTECTION WILL NOT ONLY BRING WORKPLACE UP TO SPECIFICATIONS, BUT WILL ALSO HELP IN KEEPING EMPLOYEES SAFE AND FREE FROM WORK-RELATED INJURIES, WRITES **DR SUDHIR AGARWAL**.

Safety footwear includes steel toe, non-metal toe, metatarsal-guarded, slip-resistant, Electrical Hazard, Antistatic, ESD, conductive, cold environment, heat-resistant, chemical-resistant, and fatigue protection. Style comes later. Remember, sometimes style itself become a hazard.



A more programmed approach to making foot protection purchases - one that focuses as much on comfort, durability and anti-slip protection, might reduce worker injuries. The following checklist outlines steps required to make an informed purchase, including specification, choices, and motivation factors in foot protection. The purpose of a programmed approach to foot protection is to bring workplace up to specs, and to keep employees safe. To begin, understand the three foot protection specifications prevalent right now:

- ▶ IS 15298 (Part II): 2011 Safety footwear with 200 Joules Toe cap
- ▶ IS 15298 (Part III): 2011 Protective footwear with 100 Joules Toe cap
- ▶ IS 15298 (Part IV): 2012 Occupational footwear with no Toe cap

Buy only footwear compliant with any one of above. The preferred option is to buy ISI marked footwear. The DGMS marking has been abolished vide a circular dated 14th August 2014. There are two major categories of work-related foot injuries. The first includes foot injuries from punctures, crushing, sprains, lacerations, and thermal/chemical injuries. This also includes injuries related to electricity. The second includes those resulting from slips, trips and falls which is the most neglected part. Look for slip resistance rating (SRA, SRB and SRC). Pain and fatigue have a direct impact on productivity, and can lead to further injuries.

Perform Complete Facility Check

A complete facility analysis is the perfect way to launch a comprehensive protective footwear program. It can be undertaken by a Safety Officer or by a trained third-party professional, either a footwear manufacturer representative or a dedicated safety distributor, or both - is invited to walk through the plant, and observe foot protection use, or lack thereof, in every area of the facility. A good place to start a safety audit is a thorough examination of the plant's injury rate. By working together to analyse these records, one can develop objectives for the rest of the survey.

Remember the fundamental principle of occupational health and safety. Tips that may improve workplace design are:

- ▶ Regulate areas where pedestrian traffic and mobile equipment meet to help avoid crushed feet and toes. Consider installing safety mirrors and warning signs. Also, consider designated pedestrian pathways
- ▶ Check that proper guarding is in place on saws, rotary mowers and other power equipment and machinery that can cause cuts or severed feet or toes
- ▶ Improved housekeeping can prevent loose nails and other sharp objects from causing puncture injuries, as well as slips and falls
- ▶ Stairs, ramps and passageways are hot spots for trips and falls. Use colour contrast and angular lighting to improve depth of vision

Ask and then wear test

The next step in the process is to get down to the plant floor. Talk to the workers who face a facility's hazards every day. Discuss the types of hazards they face, and then address comfort, sizing, distribution, training and other issues affecting compliance. When workers are part of a solution, they will be more likely to support the implementation of any change in the program. Because cost is almost always a factor, the analysis should include input from the purchasing department.

After selecting the footwear, wear test is very important for ensuring the comfort. The old adage too often is true: "When your feet hurt, you hurt all over." While difficult to measure, fatigue can be a contributor to accidents. More comfortable footwear choices mean people will grow less tired during the long workday and, hence, less likely to have a fatigue-related mishap. The secret here is a good in-sock.

Structurally, boots should fit snugly around the heel and ankle when laced (protective footwear should always be laced up fully; high-cut boots provide support against ankle injury). As for the fit, boots and shoes should have ample toe room (toes should be about 12.5mm from the front). Footwear that is too tight will not stretch with wear to a great extent. Have both feet measured when buying shoes because it is normal that feet differ in size. Shoes should be purchased that fit the larger size. Buy shoes late in the afternoon when feet are likely to be swollen to their maximum size. Employees should be provided at least two pair of footwear so that they can wear them alternatively, and it doing so fungal infection is almost eliminated. Footwear should always be stored in an airy place.

The author is postgraduate in Orthopaedics and looks after the sales and marketing of JCB Safety Footwear. He can be reached at www.jcbfootwear.com or sudhir.agarwal@rahman-group.com.