

STAYING on your FEET

By DR. KEVAN ORVITZ

Increase footwear effectiveness & longevity through an engaged safety program

Safety programs ensure that workers are properly cared for and that employees can stay on their feet for years to come. In 2016, the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the workforce suffered around 100,000 occupational foot injuries. Being proactive about safety footwear protects employees from countless dangerous safety hazards. Beyond providing workers with proper PPE and footwear, it's equally important to discuss how to take care of safety footwear to ensure effectiveness and increase longevity.

Much like each safety program should begin from the ground up, taking care of safety footwear has a similar protocol

Inspect and select to protect

When you create a safety program you discuss inspecting each employee's workplace. Uncovering potential hazards can create a strong foundation for a successful safety program. Inspecting safety footwear has very similar principals. Understanding the various functions and parts of the shoe can help the wearer identify when footwear needs to be maintained or re-placed. Daily footwear inspection may sound like a lot of work, but in reality it takes a moment to spot something that can cause a lifetime of pain.

Checking shoes for signs of wear such as cracking, tearing or damage helps determine if the shoe's protective qualities are still intact. If the wearer is unsure about safety, a cracked or crushed sole, torn leather or fabric, or uncovered protective piece is found, then the shoes need to be replaced and should not be worn for safety purposes.

Just as inspecting the workplace and footwear is important, so is selecting the right footwear for each specific role within the workplace. It's important to recognize what materials the employee is handling, if items may fall on or roll over their feet, if they work around nails or other equipment that may penetrate their shoe, and the type of walking surface they typically are on. All of these conditions can affect the type of footwear necessary for the worker.

Different types of safety footwear is designed for specific wearers and uses. If someone is

an electrician or plumber, each faces different workplaces and hazards. However both require safe and comfortable footwear that protects them from workplace dangers. Some employees or workers may require static dissipative footwear that helps reduce excess static electricity while others may require slip resistant footwear to avoid falling on wet or oily surfaces.

Follow the leader

Remember how much fun you had a child playing follow the leader. One step at a time, each kid behind you would recognize your actions and mimic them as closely as possible. Not much has changed when it comes to running a safety program. Leading by example sets a precedent for excellence.

Showing workers how to follow safety footwear guidelines keeps everyone engaged and on the same page. Employees should always follow the manufacturer's instructions and can review footwear concerns as a team. Showing your employees the importance of footwear maintenance is an investment that is certain to pay off. Caring for your footwear not only ensures they maintain all of their safety qualities, but also increases longevity of use.

Reviewing footwear maintenance and care principles together as a team shows workers that management is invested in their daily work experience. Not only does it keep everyone engaged in workplace safety but it's an excellent reminder that caring for your work boots and footwear increases their longevity and effectiveness.

It's what's on the inside that counts

Taking care of the exterior of safety footwear is important to make sure that nothing dangerous penetrates the shoe. However, many people neglect to take care of what is on the inside of the shoe. Safety programs should utilize personal anti-fatigue mat insoles. These provide shock absorption while reducing pain and fatigue with every step.

Providing employees with exceptional foot support and comfort does more than just keep them happy on their feet, it reduces foot, knee, ankle, back and neck pain. Anti-fatigue insoles prevent imbalance, a common culprit of physical aches and pains. Feet are the foundation of the body and many physical problems begin from the ground up. Ensuring employees have proper foot support provides them with the preventative care needed in the workplace.

Following in the right footsteps

Every footwear and safety program must include evaluating work spaces for slip, trips and falls. These safety hazards account for a large percentage of absenteeism, injury and fatalities. Many of these cases could be prevented by safety programs that require employees to wear proper safety footwear, that is inspected frequently, and well taken

care of. Water or oil spills, which are a major cause of slipping injuries in the workplace, can be reduced by using slip-resistant footwear which provides more effective grip on a slippery floor.

Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility. Every single worker is at risk for foot injury if they lack the necessary protective equipment, such as proper footwear and anti-fatigue in-soles. Safety footwear is designed to keep wearers safe from unnecessary harm and hazards. The cost is small when compared to the damage and pain that can occur without them.

Workplace injuries can result in tremendous financial, emotional and physical loss. Make sure your safety program helps workers select the right type of footwear for each individual's role. Supporting your workforce creates an atmosphere of safety appreciation and engagement. Protecting your workers starts from the ground up, make sure you give them the support and care they deserve.

Dr. Kevan Orvitz is a world-renowned and licensed podiatrist and foot health expert. He is also founder and CEO of MEGAComfort, a work boot and shoe insole company.