



Loss Control Insight

Foot Safety in the Workplace

Putting your best foot forward means wearing the right kind of foot protection.

Recent statistics from the National Safety Council reported 180,000 disabling injuries to feet and toes each year. But that's not the whole story. What about lower-back fatigue and feeling exhausted at the end of a day spent on your feet? You need to take proper care of your feet at work.

When somebody mentions safety footwear, most of us think of the standard old safety boots, which have a special steel protection around the toes. They also have high ankles for protection and support. They may be insulated and waterproof, and they have a special hard insole to prevent puncture wounds.

What's the right kind of foot protection for you? It's not as easy as just throwing on a pair of steel-toed boots. In fact, there are more types of protective footwear than you probably imagine.

One good example is found in the mining industry. There can be as many as 18 different types of protective footwear worn in just one mine. Everyone has different needs when safety and comfort are combined.

The simple fact is that safety shoes need to be worn wherever there is danger of foot injury, according to many governmental regulatory organizations. Foot injuries can come from falling or rolling objects, or from something piercing the sole of your shoes or boots.



The common safety-toed footwear protects by shielding the foot with hard plastics or steel. Many other footwear designs and materials are available to protect against hazards such as chemical exposure, temperature extremes, infection and electrical shock.

Your footwear needs to protect against all the potential dangers identified in the hazard assessment of your job and work area.

The next step is talking to someone who knows the safety shoe market. Your supervisor may be able to help you with this. When shopping for the right safety boot, it's important to remember not to go by looks; we all know looks can be deceiving. Take the 'hiking boot' for example. It has deep treads. It looks like it will stop you from slipping on a skating rink. But that's not necessarily the case. Deep treads on any boot can become slippery under certain conditions. Think about your tires slipping on a patch of black ice.

Once you have the right protection nailed down, it's time to shop for comfort. You need to think of comfort when you think of safety. While uncomfortable safety shoes will lower your productivity at work, they will also impact your life when you punch out and head home. Feeling like you have to get off your feet for a couple of hours when you get home is something you can change. There are many styles and sizes available suited to most everyone's needs. Did you know there are steel toed running shoes available that might fulfill your safety needs in mildly hazardous environments? Check with your supervisor first.

Replace your safety-toed footwear on an as-needed basis. One rule of thumb is that when two-thirds of the back heel is worn, it's time to buy a new pair. Inspect and clean the sole, and the protective material in the boot or shoe. Remember, the life expectancy of any boot or shoe is dependent on the environment you wear them in.

Eliminate and avoid foot hazards. Choose the right protective footwear and take care of it.