

Choosing and using prescription safety eyewear

By Heather Prime

Flying objects from drilling, sparks from soldering, a chemical splash from spraying — these are just a few of the hazards facing B.C. workers every day — hazards capable of causing serious eye injury, even blindness.

From 1997 to 2001, more than 10,000 B.C. workers suffered work-related eye injuries. How do you avoid a similar fate? Always wear the right safety eyewear for the job and the jobsite. Many eye injuries are caused by a general hazard in the workplace rather than a specific task the worker is doing; that's why it's so important to consider the jobsite as well.

Who should wear protective eyewear?

Part 8 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation requires you to use safety eyewear when you:

- Handle or are exposed to materials that are likely to injure or irritate your eyes
- Have 20/200 vision, or less, in either eye
- Test or work on electrical equipment energized at a potential greater than 30 volts

That's straightforward, but what if you already wear corrective lenses — and 40 percent of Canadians do. How do you protect yourself?

Prescription safety glasses are the answer. Everyday street eyewear simply does not offer adequate protection. To qualify as safety eyewear, prescription safety glasses must meet CSA Standard CAN/CSA-Z94.3-92. (In some cases, ANSI Standard Z87.1-1989 is acceptable as well.)

Do your prescription glasses pass this test?

To ensure your glasses make the grade, take the following test:



- **Frame** — Can you find “Z87” on the temple pieces? That mark confirms that the frame meets ANSI Standard Z87.1, is stronger than standard street-wear frames, and thus prevents the lenses from being pushed into your eyes.
- **Lenses** — Take a look at the front of your glasses and see if you can find the manufacturer's logo molded or etched into the top outside edges of the lenses. CSA-certified lenses are made of polycarbonate or plastic, but you can't assume that all polycarbonate lenses provide adequate impact-resistance. To be safe, ensure that the thinnest part of your lenses is at least three millimetres thick.
- **Side shields** — Safety glasses should have side shields. If you wear your prescription safety glasses only on the job, you should have the side shields permanently mounted to the frame.

It's equally important to ensure your safety eyewear fits the type of work you do. If your bifocals or trifocals are made of glass, and there is a danger of impact, they must be worn behind impact-rated

goggles (or other protection acceptable to the WCB). If your bifocals or trifocals have polycarbonate or plastic lenses, you do not have to cover them with impact-rated goggles.

Other options in safety eyewear

If contact lenses are more your style, you can wear non-prescription (or “plano”) safety glasses over your contacts; however, contacts may not be suitable in dusty, dry, or chemically charged environments.

When visiting a workplace where safety eyewear is required, wearing safety goggles over your prescription street glasses is generally acceptable.

If there is a risk of face injury, CSA Standard Z94.3-92 recommends that you wear protective goggles under your face shield.

Assess your needs

Finally, to determine the most appropriate eyewear solution for you, your employer should conduct a thorough assessment of your workplace, job, and its related hazards — before you become an injury statistic.

For more information, contact your WCB officer, call the WCB Prevention Information Line at 604 276-3100, toll-free at 1 888 621-7233, or visit the following web sites:

- Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Part 8
<http://regulation.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/Part8.asp>
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
<http://ccohs.ca/oshanswers/prevention/ppe/glasses.html>
- Occupational Health and Safety Canada www.ohscanada.com

