

5

minute safety talk



Eye Wash and Safety Showers

It can happen in an instant. While mixing a chemical, workers accidentally touch their face, rubbing some of the substance into their eyes. They instantly experience pain and are unable to focus.

Although prevention is the most important step against eye and skin injuries, immediate flushing or rinsing is often the best action when a chemical or foreign object enters the eye or splashes onto the skin. Eye wash stations and safety showers are dedicated equipment used for this purpose.

Organizations must place eye wash stations and safety showers in their facilities in accordance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and American National Standards Institute (ANSI) requirements. It's generally accepted that this equipment be located where an injured worker can reach it within 10 seconds of contact with the chemical or foreign object. Eye wash stations and safety showers must be highly visible, clearly marked, and easily accessible, with pathways to the devices free of clutter and other impediments.

Eye Wash Stations

An organization may choose to use both primary and secondary eyewash units:

- **Primary units** deliver flushing fluid for at least 15 minutes – the duration required by OSHA and ANSI standards, and the amount of time generally needed to remove most objects from the eye. Primary units are available in both portable and plumbed formats. Portable units have a self-contained source of flushing fluid, while plumbed formats are permanently connected to a water source. Primary units are also installed for hands-free operation, leaving workers' hands open to care for their injured eyes.
- **Secondary units** are intended to support primary units and supply less than the primary minimum flushing amounts. These stations can be used for flushing the eye on the way to a primary unit or in cases where the full 15 minutes of flushing is not required. It can also be used when transporting a worker to seek medical care.

For proper flushing of the eye, the water stream must touch the cornea itself and the stream must last several minutes to ensure all residue is removed.

Safety Showers

Safety showers are designed to provide water to the entire body upon activation. For proper use, a worker must thoroughly rinse for at least 15 minutes to make sure all contaminants are washed away. If clothing is contaminated, it must be removed and properly disposed.

Maintenance & Training

Once properly installed, eye wash stations and safety showers must be regularly inspected, tested, and maintained to ensure they remain in good working order.

For the equipment to be effective, workers must also be trained in proper use. Supervisors must inform employees of the eye wash and safety shower locations nearest their work areas, and make sure they understand how and when to properly use them.