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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PROTECTING YOUR EYES: SET UP AN EYEWASH STATION

Simple steps make a lifetime of difference.

No matter where it happens, a chemical eye injury is an emergency. When chemicals come in contact with our eyes, damage can occur within one to five minutes.

In a farm shop, irritating chemicals such as cleaning chemicals, paint, fuel, pesticide, herbicide, etc. are commonly found. While liquids like these are typically involved in exposure of the eyes, solids, gases, vapors, and mists may also be involved in an emergency exposure.

A key step on preventing eye injuries from chemical contact is the use of protective eye equipment, such as goggles. It's also critical to identify what chemicals are in the shop and understand the dangers each poses if someone is exposed through their skin or eyes.

Symptoms of chemical contact with the eyes include a burning sensation in the eye, excessive tearing, pain, redness in the eye and on the eyelid surface, and blurred vision. After chemical exposure occurs, the first 10 to 15 seconds are critical to reducing damage from the exposure. If the injured person doesn't receive first aid right away, injuries such as permanent eye damage or even blindness can quickly occur.

In addition to wearing protective goggles when working in the farm shop, an emergency eye wash station should be set up so it can be accessed within a few seconds of an eye emergency. An emergency shower is also recommended. It can be used to help flush eyes after an exposure or in the event that caustic chemicals come in contact with clothes or skin.

In selecting eyewash equipment, there are some options. However, it's critical to ensure that the station holds an adequate amount of water to thoroughly flush the eyes in the event of an emergency.

When using water to flush eyes, the temperature should be comfortable, typically between 60 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Hotter water can actually facilitate chemical reactions, causing more damage to eyes. Colder water usually causes discomfort, causing people to not flush the eyes for the required full 15 minutes.

It's also critical to ensure water pressure isn't too high, which will injure the eyes. The flow of water from an emergency eyewash source should be at a rate of 0.4 gallons per minute for 15 minutes.

Ideally, a plumbed eyewash station can be established. This type of station is preferred when a water source is available because it will supply more than enough water for any type of chemical exposure situation. Self-contained stations should hold at least six gallons of water and be mounted between 33 and 45 inches from the floor.

Plumbed and self-contained are the two most common types of eyewash stations. Two other options are available. One is a hand-held bottle that can be kept at hand and used to immediately flush the eyes. The disadvantage of this type of flushing option is the fact that it does not supply adequate water to flush the eyes for 15 minutes. For that reason, a hand-held bottle should be used as a temporary first aid solution until the injured person can access a larger eyewash station.

Another option is a hand-held drench hose, which can be directed at someone's eyes. This option should be used in conjunction with an eyewash station. Unless help is present, an injured person couldn't easily hold the hose while holding their eyes open at the same time.

Whichever option is available, eyewash stations must be located in specific areas that are within a 10-second walking distance (about 55 feet) from where an injury could occur because affected eyes must be flushed within that short time frame.

Since an injured person may have impaired vision as a result of the chemical exposure, pathways to the eyewash station must not be obstructed in any way. Unless another person is present to provide assistance, it's not advised to require the affected person to go through doors to reach the eyewash station. Locating the eyewash station close to an exit in the building will make it easier for emergency responders to easily reach the person.

In designing the station, select water valves that can be left on to allow water to continuously flow so the injured person can use both hands to hold their eyes open. The station should be designed so the water source stands between 33 and 45 inches above the floor and at least six inches from any nearby wall. These specifications will make it easiest for workers to bend over and reach the water source to flush their eyes.

The eyewash station should also have a drainage system to collect excess water to avoid having chemicals flow into the workplace area or adjoining water sources.

The station water source can be water that's safe for drinking or one of several chemical or isotonic solutions approved for flushing eyes. Eyewash solutions are typically used in portable squeeze bottles that can provide immediate first aid.

Do NOT rub the eyes if exposure occurs, even after flushing them with water. As soon as possible, call for emergency assistance. Continue to flush the eyes for 15 minutes while emergency assistance is enroute. Regardless of the type of injury or results of flushing, consult a physician as quickly as possible and be prepared to provide information about the chemical involved in the exposure.

Don't assume that everyone who may need to use the eyewash station understands how to use it. Take time for a practice drill that helps every person in the work area understand how to utilize the station. It's recommended to post instructions for using the eyewash station next to the equipment. The injured person may not be able to read the instructions, but other workers in the area may be able to help.

An added measure of safety is labeling all hazardous chemicals in the shop and shop area. The labels should include important first aid information that could help in treating a chemical exposure.

To prevent the development of amoebic and bacterial growth in eyewash station waterlines, regularly turn the system on to flush out water that sits in plumbed equipment. These types of bacteria can cause severe eye infections when introduced into traumatized eyes. For self-contained eyewash stations, follow manufacturer's guidelines. Fluids in this type of station may expire and need to be replaced periodically.

An inspection of a plumbed station should include monitoring whether or not the water is clear, if the faucets are working properly, and if the area around the station is clear of any obstructions. Verify that containers intended to collect runoff are in working condition and don't contain any leaks.

A variety of commercial eyewash designs are available and it's well worth the effort to identify one that enhances safety in the farm shop.

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