University of Regina

SAFETY ADVISORY

Basic Lab PPE: Why It's Important to Always Be Covered

Health, Safety and Wellness has investigated several recent incidents of eye exposures that resulted from lab activities conducted while not wearing safety glasses. While the chemicals in both cases weren't extremely hazardous, they are still known to cause severe eye irritation, and in one case, a tiny piece of broken glass may have been involved. Both incidents required medical attention, one of which was transported to the hospital via ambulance.

Findings: There are many lab users who believe that, due to the less hazardous nature of the chemicals they use, safety glasses are not required. However, this does not take into account the multitude of other hazards, and the sensitive nature of the eye.

Vision is one of our greatest senses, and it would be tragic to lose

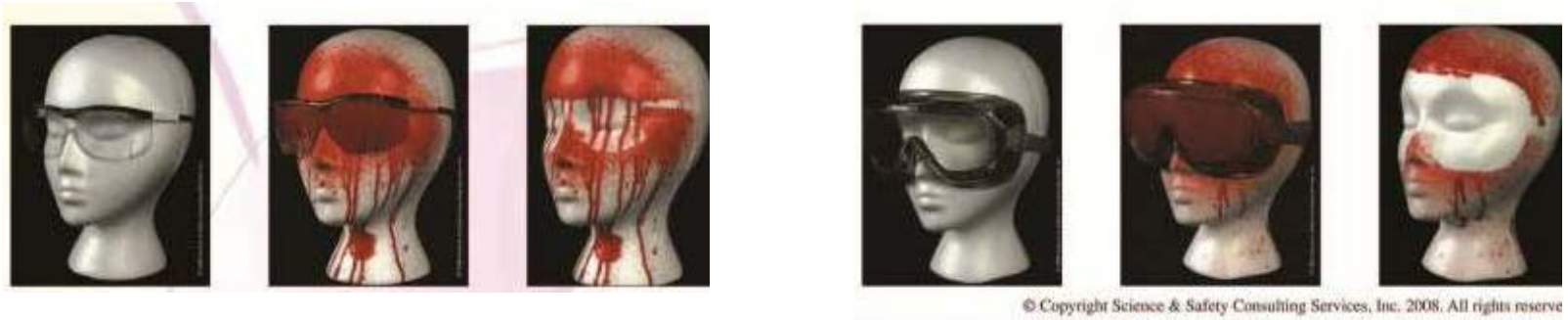
Important things to note about eye protection:

- Safety glasses protect the eye from hazards such as broken glass, and other small projectiles that can occur when things break, when dusts are kicked up, or when small splashes of liquids spray towards the face. (Similarly, other PPE like long pants, enclosed shoes, and lab coats will protect other parts of your body from these same hazards).
- These incidents highlight the importance of always wearing safety glasses in the lab, you never know what can happen!
- Prescription glasses are not sufficient protection: they do not have side shields, or full coverage that safety glasses do, and are not made from impact and chemical resistant materials.
- If you wear prescription glasses, you must have "'over-the-glasses" (OTG) safety glasses over top, to provide this additional protection. Both types of safety glasses are available at UR Stores.

Standard Safety Glasses

OTG Safety Glasses

- Safety glasses are considered the **bare minimum** eye protection, not the ultimate solution to eye protection for all circumstances. This is why risk assessing your activities is crucial!
- If you are working with hazardous chemicals, it is important to understand the other levels of eye protection that exist: safety goggles, and face shields. The following photo shows why safety glasses will not be sufficient in many cases.



- Left: a splash while wearing safety glasses will still result in the liquid dripping into the eyes. Right: the eyes are protected by goggles that are sealed to the face. However, if the liquid is corrosive, or toxic, many areas of the face are still being exposed, and injury and adverse health effects from this chemical exposure can result. A full face shield should be used in these cases.

Other Practical Considerations Regarding Lab PPE:

- PPE choice must always be based on a risk assessment of the activities in your lab, and the specific tasks you are performing. However, the bare minimum should **always** be in place.
- This includes: Safety glasses, lab coats, long pants, enclosed shoes, hair tied back, and any dangling accessories, lanyards, scarves, etc. be removed or restrained in such a way as to prevent entanglement or interference with one's work.
- Similar to how everyone buckles their seat belt when they get into a vehicle, everyone must don this basic level of PPE when entering a lab space. Walking through the lab space before donning PPE leaves you open to the hazards around you, as well as potentially forgetting to don PPE at all once you get distracted with your work.
- Each lab must have a selection of lab coats and safety glasses to lend to anyone who visits your lab.
- Each lab member should have their own set of PPE that is specific to their needs (OTG vs regular safety glasses for example) as this will avoid personal hygiene issues that may result from sharing PPE.

- This type of PPE is considered standard in industry and government labs. By not adopting the same standard here, we are doing a disservice to those who are here to learn and prepare for a career. Even if you don't think the hazards warrant wearing PPE all the time (while using desk space for example), it is extremely beneficial to get into the habit.

Safety is everyone's responsibility!

While the supervisor is responsible for setting expectations and enforcing the use of PPE at all times, each lab member should remind and encourage others to always be safe.

Legal Considerations:

- Wearing PPE, and enforcing the use of PPE in areas under your control, is not only the right thing to do, it's the law!
- Remember, Summary Offense Tickets (SOT) can be issued by an Occupational Health Officer from the Provincial Government for failing to provide PPE, failing to enforce its use, and failing to wear PPE provided.

Things to help:

- HSW can assist with risk assessment of your lab activities to help determine your specific PPE and other safety needs.
- Always read the Safety Data Sheet for any chemicals you use or handle, and ensure you understand the hazards.
- If you're having difficulty finding proper fitting PPE, there are many additional places to purchase PPE from. UR Stores carries basic, most commonly used PPE, but make sure you realize there are other options available!

The University of Regina is committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of all its community members, as well as to the provision of a safe and healthy work and study environment.

HUMAN RESOURCES
Health, Safety & Wellness
Ad Hum Building, Rm 435
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada S4S 0A2
Phone: 306.585.4776
E-mail: health.safety@uregina.ca
www.uregina.ca/hr/

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Contact information for Advisory:
Sarah Wilke, Chemical & Laboratory Safety Advisor
PH. 306-337-3184 sarah.posehn@uregina.ca