

Spot The Safety Violation: Don't Play Hide-and-Seek with Eyewash Stations



If you got a chemical, dust or other irritant in your eyes, how easily do you think you'd be able to find this eyewash station to flush out your eyes'



Workers' eyes can get injured on the job if chemicals, dust, particles, etc. get into them. And without quick action, their vision can become impaired. So the first step is usually to flush the worker's eyes out to remove the irritants. But workers can't take this key step if they can't find an eyewash station when one is needed.

In this picture from the US Naval Safety Center, the eyewash station is practically hidden behind a locker for hazardous materials. If a worker's eyes were blurry or burning due to an irritant, he may not be able to see well, making it even harder for him to quickly and easily locate this station.

Any delay in rinsing out a worker's eyes can increase the likelihood of serious or even permanent damage to his eyes and/or vision. That's why the OHS laws often bar employers from blocking access to eyewash stations.

10 Keys to Protecting Workers' Eyes

To protect workers' eyes and their vision, first provide them with appropriate eye protection, which can range from safety glasses and goggles to full face shields, depending on the nature of the specific hazards. (Here's a model eye and face protection policy you can adapt for your workplace.)

In addition, you may also need to have an eyewash station available in the workplace in the event that workers get something in their eyes despite eye protection. If you have an eyewash station such as the one in the picture,

implement these best practices:

1. **Keep the doors open.** Don't place an emergency eyewash station behind a closed or locked door. Although the station may be used infrequently, remember that when it's needed, someone's vision is on the line and every second counts.
2. **Don't hang the station at an angle.** Doing so can interfere with the proper flow of flushing fluid and may force an injured person to stand in an uncomfortable position to flush their eyes properly.
3. **Don't block access. Don't** follow the example in the picture instead, avoid placing anything underneath, around or in front of an eyewash station, which can block an injured worker's ability to find, access or stand comfortably at the station.
4. **Watch the fluid's temperature.** Don't allow the flushing fluid to become too hot or too cold. Storing flushing fluid in extremely hot or cold environments can cause its temperature to rise or fall outside of standards for tepid water. And flushing eyes with scalding or ice-cold solution can cause further damage to an already compromised eye.
5. **Fill the station properly.** Avoid mistakes when mixing flushing fluid. Always prepare this fluid according to the manufacturer's instructions. And don't substitute regular, unsterile water for the eyewash solution.
6. **Clean thoroughly after use.** Don't forget to clean, disinfect, rinse and completely dry the station after each activation, including its hoses, nozzles and nozzle covers (but not the sealed-fluid cartridges). Any lingering cleaning chemicals or particles may harm the next user's eyes. When the wrong chemicals mix, the fluid may turn brown or another color and colored fluid should be used.
7. **Don't cover the station.** Don't place a plastic bag or other makeshift cover over the station to keep out dust or particles, which can hinder an injured person's ability to properly activate the unit in a single motion and start the flow in one second or less.
8. **Mind the shelf life.** Avoid using expired flushing fluid. Like any standing water, eyewash fluid can grow bacteria that may be harmful to eyes. Be sure that someone's responsible for checking expiration dates and refilling/replacing expired fluid according to the manufacturer's guidelines, such as every two to three years for sealed-fluid cartridges and bottles. In addition, plumbed stations should generally be flushed weekly and tank-style fluid stations every three to six months.
9. **Install the station correctly.** Don't install an eyewash station without carefully following the manufacturer's instructions. Stations vary and have precise installation instructions to ensure proper performance, including installation height, the rate of fluid flow, required spray pattern and much more.
10. **Don't alter or tamper with the station.** Again, the manufacturer's instructions are the only ones that should be followed. Don't try to re-route hoses, change nozzles or otherwise compromise the station's performance.

For more first aid related information, go to OHSInsider.com for:

- Information on an employer's first aid legal obligations
- How to comply with the first aid provider requirements
- First aid room checklist
- Model First Aid Record.