Spot The Safety Violation: What You Wear Does Matter

Yes, the way this worker is dressed in a lab is hazardous. What should he be wearing’

They say that clothes make the man. In a workplace, you might say that PPE makes the worker’or more accurately, PPE *saves* the worker. That’s because wearing appropriate PPE, such as safety footwear, respiratory protection and the like, can protect workers from injuries and illnesses. Even wearing appropriate clothing in the workplace provides a basic level of protection from some hazards.

This picture from the University of Texas Laboratory Safety Manual shows a student worker in a lab, who’s dressed

inappropriately and unsafely.

For example, by wearing short sleeves and shorts, he’s exposing the skin on his arms and legs to hazardous substances. Because he’s wearing flip flops, his feet are also exposed to hazardous substances. In addition, such footwear doesn’t provide protection from slips or trips and falls or from falling objects. And the worker isn’t wearing any PPE.

This is what the student worker *should* be wearing:

In a work environment, such as a lab, where workers work with or near hazardous substances, they should wear a combination of proper personal clothing and PPE, such as lab coats, so their skin is essentially covered from the shoulders to the hands and feet. Note that this worker is also wearing safety googles as well as gloves.

Also, such workers should wear closed-toed shoes with slip-resistant, non-absorbent soles. Proper safety footwear reduces the potential for exposure to hazardous substances and injuries from broken glass and dropped items.

PPE AND CLOTHING

To ensure that workers are properly protected and that you

comply with the requirements for safety footwear contained in your jurisdiction's OHS regulations, you should:

> Conduct a risk assessment for hazards to workers' feet such as:

- Slip or trip and fall hazards, such as uneven terrain;
- Crushing potential;
- Extreme temperatures;
- Corrosive or other hazardous substances;
- Puncture hazards;
- Electrical shock; and
- Any other recognizable foot hazard.

Use this safety footwear risk assessment checklist to make sure your assessment is thorough and covers all workers who could potentially be exposed to a foot hazard.

> If the assessment reveals the presence of foot hazards, select the type of safety footwear that's appropriate to protect your workers' feet from the identified hazards and ensure that workers wear such footwear.

Bottom line: Unless your workers are, say, lifeguards, flips flops will rarely be appropriate footwear in the workplace.

It's also important to ensure that workers' hands are adequately protected when they're exposed to the risk of cuts, strained muscles and tendons, damaged nerves, skin disorders, amputations and burns. So provide appropriate protection such as latex gloves or work gloves. And make sure workers understand the hazards that pose a risk to hands and fingers and how to protect them. (See, Hand Safety Toolbox Talk Handout.)

If workers' eyes are exposed to any hazards, such as dust, fumes, splashing chemicals, etc., ensure that you select and workers use appropriate eye protection. Similarly, if workers are at risk of inhaling hazardous substances, make sure they

wear proper respiratory protection.

Lastly, set a dress code that spells out what workers should and shouldn’t wear on the job. For example, to protect workers from becoming entangled in machinery, require them to wear short sleeves and tie their hair back or otherwise secure it, such as in a bun or hairnet. And bar them from wearing jewelry.

Conversely, if workers are exposed to hazardous substances, require them to wear long sleeves and pants to protect their skin. Depending on the type and degree of risk, you may also need to require them to wear protective clothing, such as lab coats or hazmat suits.