



EMPLOYERS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

In designing strategies to protect your staff, one has to remember the fundamental principle of occupational health and safety: occupational hazards should be eliminated at the source.

There is no workplace where a worker is immune to injury, however, the hazards differ according to the workplace and the types of tasks the worker does. The first step is to identify the relevant hazards at the workplace. Such hazards should be assessed in each workplace, no matter how safe or how dangerous it may seem.

Injuries can be financially crippling so it's vital to protect your workers. One in five injuries in the workplace affects the lower limbs including the feet and toes!

- Ensure the right footwear is used for the right job.
- There are many brands, designs and types of safety footwear available. Ask us to advise on the correct footwear for use.
- Comfortable safety footwear increases productivity and creates a happier work place.
- Good quality safety footwear should not be uncomfortable if correctly fitted.
- Do a 'Foot Risk Assessment' in the workplace – look for ways to minimise the burden on your employees' feet.
- If your employees wear safety shoes, ask yourself: Do we stock an adequate range of safety shoes to suit every staff member? If not, out-sourcing the supply and fit of safety shoes may be more cost-effective.
- Allow employees a crossover period when they exchange their old safety shoes for a new pair
- Be aware of the hazards in your workplace. If you have concerns about foot safety, alert your employer or safety officer



How can the job design improve foot safety?

Aching, flat or tired feet are common among workers who spend most of their working time standing.

The most important goal of job design is to avoid fixed positions especially fixed standing positions. Good job design includes varied tasks requiring changes in body position and using different muscles. Job rotation, job enlargement, team work and rest breaks are all ways to make work easier on the feet.

- Job rotation moves workers from one job to another. It distributes standing among a group of workers and shortens the time each individual spends standing. However, it must be a rotation where the worker does something completely different such as walking around or sitting at the next job.
- Job enlargement includes more and different tasks in a worker's duties. If it increases the variety of body positions and motions, the worker has less chance of developing foot problems.
- Team work gives the whole team more control and autonomy in planning and allocation of the work. Each team member carries a set of various operations to complete the whole product. Team work allows workers to alternate between tasks which, in turn, reduce the risk of overloading the feet.
- Rest breaks help to alleviate foot problems where redesigning jobs is impractical. Frequent short breaks are preferable to fewer long breaks.

How can the workplace design improve foot safety?

Redesigning the job alone will not effectively reduce foot problems if it is not combined with the proper design of the workplace.

- For standing jobs, an adjustable work surface is the best choice. If the work surface is not adjustable, two solutions include installing a platform to raise the shorter worker or a pedestal to raise the object for a taller worker.
- Work station design should allow the worker room to change body position.
- A foot-rail or footrest enables the worker to shift weight from one leg to the other. This reduces the stress on the lower legs and feet.
- Where possible, a worker should be able to work sitting or standing at will. Even when work can only be done while standing, a seat should be provided for resting purposes.

How can the kind of floor improve foot comfort?

Standing or working on a hard, unyielding floor can cause a lot of discomfort. Wood, cork, carpeting, or rubber - anything that provides some flexibility - is gentler on workers' feet. Where resilient floors are not practical, footwear with thick, insulating soles and shock-absorbing insoles can alleviate discomfort. Anti-fatigue matting can also be useful wherever workers have to stand or walk. They provide a cushioning which reduces foot fatigue. However, the use of matting requires caution. When installed improperly, it can lead to tripping and slipping accidents.

Special anti-slip flooring or matting can reduce slipping accidents. If installed properly, these mats are useful, but workers may find that their feet burn and feel sore. The non-slip

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properties of the flooring mat cause their shoes to grab suddenly on the flooring making their feet slide forward inside the shoes. Friction inside the shoes produces heat that creates soreness and, eventually, calluses. A non-slip resilient insole can reduce this discomfort.

How can one improve the foot safety in workplaces where foot injuries occur frequently?

Job and workplace designs also have the potential to increase foot safety in workplaces that are specifically hazardous. Here are some examples:

- Separating mobile equipment from pedestrian traffic and installing safety mirrors and warning signs can decrease the number of accidents that might result in cut or crushed feet or toes.
- Proper guarding of machines such as chain saws or rotary mowers can avoid cuts or severed feet or toes.
- Effective housekeeping reduces the number of accidents at workplaces. For example, loose nails, other sharp objects, and littered walkways are hazards for foot injury.
- Using colour contrast and angular lighting to improve depth vision in complicated areas such as stairs, ramps and passageways reduces the hazard of tripping and falling.



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