

# Here's Looking at You

By HMCS(SW) Mark Sanders,  
Naval Safety Center

Think about what it would be like to live in total blackness. If you were born blind, you wouldn't know what you're missing but if you lose your sight, that's a different story. Just the thought makes my skin crawl.

Although an amazing organ, the eye doesn't stand up well to foreign materials or liquids. Therefore, you must protect your eyes when doing hazardous tasks. When I visit eye-hazard areas during afloat safety surveys, four out of five times I find at least one Sailor without protective eyewear, or wearing the wrong type of protective eyewear. This compounds the hazard because workers wearing the wrong protection falsely think their eyes are protected.

When working with liquids, you must have splash-proof or chemical goggles (NSN 4240-00-190-6432 and 4240-00-764-5152). When chipping paint, sanding or grinding, you must have impact or industrial goggles (NSN 4240-00-052-3776). A face shield (NSN 4240-00-542-2048 or 4240-00-202-9473) is not approved eyewear, but it does protect your face and must be used when required for the job. Check your MRC card for specific eyewear requirements.

I'm also alarmed by the often nonchalant attitude Sailors have when working in eye-hazard areas. They seemingly think mishaps happen only to "others." They don't realize that, to Sailors throughout the Navy, they are the "others." The Naval Safety Center received 60 reports from the fleet on eye-injury mishaps in FY1999 and 77 in FY2000. While significant, the numbers reflect only reported eye mishaps since, undoubtedly, many cases went unreported. Nevertheless, every reported mishap was preventable.

To keep Sailors from sustaining eye injuries requires an aggressive and effective sight-conservation program. This includes identifying command eye-hazard areas through regular zone inspections and industrial-hygiene surveys. An effective program also identifies hazardous processes or tasks, and it specifies their required protective eyewear. Leaders must set the example and enforce the rules. Meanwhile,



virtually all hands should be educated and participate in the program to achieve success.

Back to basics: Eye-wash or face-wash stations and deluge showers are the first lines of defense when Sailors don't wear PPE or wear the wrong type. If you splash a hazardous substance into your eye, immediately and continuously flush it with copious amounts of water. Eyewash stations, whether plumbed or portable, must provide at least 15 minutes of continuous water flow (see paragraph B0505 of OpNavinst 5100.19D).

Eye-wash or face-wash units are required in any space where equipment produces oxygen or nitrogen, in battery shops, battery lockers, boiler-repair shops, and rubber and plastic shops. They also are mandatory in composite-material-repair shops, non-destructive test and inspection shops, and in any space (other than weapons areas) aboard any ship where Sailors (and Marines) use or store highly corrosive chemicals.

The units must also be installed in main and auxiliary-machinery spaces; medical, dental and chemical laboratories; darkrooms; flammable-material storerooms; issue rooms; and paint lockers.

These spaces might be able to share an emergency shower, eye-wash station, or face-wash unit if the work spaces are adjacent to each other. However, the units must be easily accessible, in unobstructed locations, and installed as close to the potential eye-hazard as possible. You must be able to reach them within 10 seconds, and they cannot be more than 100 feet from the hazardous area. ☺

*The author's e-mail address is  
msanders@safetycenter.navy.mil.*



For More Info...

For further guidance about sight conservation, see Chapter B5 of OpNavinst. 5100.19D.