

Wearing the proper footwear in an industrial environment prevents slippage and provides impact protection, and there is a wealth of free information available to help remind employees of these and other concerns.

I've been thinking lately about the necessary protective footwear that should be worn in a gear manufacturing environment. I suppose that the reason for these thoughts has to do with certain recent visits to shops where I noticed that the footwear of choice seems to be what I used to call sneakers or tennis shoes. Being a grandfather, I understand that there are many more sophisticated terms for identifying this footwear, and I also realize that the price of these sneakers can easily approach that of a good pair of safety footwear. But, as a safety conscious individual, I have to express my concern over this trend.

I imagine that these shoes are very comfortable to wear, and there is some value to your employees being comfortable while working, but I have to point out that there is no real value in the safety aspect of these shoes. At a bare minimum, steel-toe caps are a requirement in shop wear in our industry. ASTM 2413-05, which replaced ANSI Z41 in 2005, is the current standard governing testing and measurement methods and requirements for compression and impact on steel-toe caps. Steel-toe work shoes and/or boots can vary greatly in price, just like your regular footwear. However, when you invest in this type of safety equipment make sure that it is compliant with the current standards, otherwise it can be a waste of money. There are alternatives available for protection on a temporary basis—such as strap-on toe caps or even strap-on foot caps—and while


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they are not intended for continuous wear, they do provide a level of protection for your employees that “forget” their safety shoes or for visitors to your facility. I also read an article recently describing a steel-toe overshoe that is similar to the old rubbers men and women used to wear to protect their shoes in inclement weather, but now are equipped with steel-toe caps.

I suggest that you take an informal survey of your shop employees. You might be surprised by the footwear being worn... I know that I was. We all know that a sharp cutting tool accidentally dropped on your toe can cause some pretty nasty injuries, but I suspect that this is another case of someone thinking “it won't happen to me.” Of course, it can happen to any of us, no matter how well trained or experienced we are. After all, that's why it's called an accident.

Last month I promised to give you some

suggestions for inexpensive ways of training your employees on the safety aspects of their jobs. Probably the best method of training available today is to have concerned, well-trained managers that remain observant and continuously contribute to the training of the employees. I find that one of the best scenarios for learning is for people to be taught while actually performing their tasks. I understand that most managers are involved with so many production and operation concerns that it is easy to ignore or even not notice a hazardous practice, but if we can just involve management in safety awareness it is still a good training aid. However, there are other inexpensive avenues available to all of us. Some are: memos with the paychecks, company bulletin boards, lunchroom wall posters, in-house safety contests, company newsletters, and insurance company handouts (your insurance company probably has posters and other information they would love for you to use). Even our government—city, county, state, and federal—has piles of free informative handouts available. Do you realize that OSHA has training materials available for the asking? If your company, or individuals in your company, belongs to any industry or community organizations, they probably offer free safety materials, as well.

What I am trying to say here is that, without any great investment in training, you can provide a decent way for your employees to stay informed and aware of the hazards facing them while in your employ. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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