

The First 10 Seconds Are Critical!

Preventing eye injuries begins with staff wearing the proper type of eye protection. This includes safety glasses, safety goggles, and face shields. The use of eye protection in the veterinary setting is recommended when handling chemotherapy drugs, pouring liquids, preparing lab samples, and even when bathing a patient.

But we know that even with the most conscientious use of eye protection, there will be incidents when a hazardous substance comes in contact with a staff member's eye(s). When this happens, the substance immediately begins to damage sensitive eye tissues. The longer these remain in contact, the greater the damage. Therefore, it is imperative to immediately begin flushing the eye(s) after contact with a harmful substance.

What is Acceptable Eyewash?

Water hoses, sink faucets, plastic squeeze bottles of eyewash solution, or conventional showers are not considered acceptable emergency eyewash or emergency shower facilities. They may be used as supplemental emergency equipment, but they should not be used in place of accepted eye and body flushing equipment.

The Cal/OSHA Regulation, Section 5162 – Eyewash and Shower Equipment, requires plumbed or self-contained eyewash equipment at all work areas where the eyes of a staff member may come into contact with a substance which can cause corrosion, severe irritation or permanent tissue damage, or which is toxic by absorption.

Personal eyewash units in the form of squeeze bottles do not meet the Cal/OSHA requirements for an emergency eyewash. The preferred equipment is a plumbed eyewash station that supplies water to flush the eyes and face OR a self-contained gravity-fed station that is capable of providing 15 minutes of continuous flow.

Emergency showers shall be provided at all work areas where during routine procedures or foreseeable emergencies, areas of the body may come in contact with a substance which is corrosive or severely irritating or which is toxic by skin absorption.

Emergency eyewash stations and showers shall be in accessible locations that require no more than 10 seconds for the injured person to reach (and on the same level as the work area). If both an eyewash station and shower are needed, they shall be located so that both can be used at the same time by one person. The eyewash and shower equipment are to be maintained free of obstructions in a well-

lit area and identified with a highly visible identifying safety sign.

Maintenance and Inspection

Emergency eyewash stations and shower equipment should be activated and inspected at least monthly.

For plumbed eyewash systems (to verify proper operation), flush the lines and remove potentially dangerous microbes from the bubbler head.

For gravity-fed eyewash systems, make sure the reservoir is filled to the manufacturer's recommended level and change the flushing fluid based on the manufacturer's specifications.

A tag should be attached to the equipment so it can be marked with the date of inspection and the inspector's initials.

Training staff on how to use emergency eyewash stations and showers can mean the difference between a minor incident and a serious injury from contact with a hazardous material.

All staff who may be exposed to hazardous, particulate, or corrosive materials should be instructed on the following:

- How to activate the eyewash and shower equipment
- How to hold eyes open to thoroughly flush the eye of contaminates
- Keeping the route between the work area and the flushing stations completely unobstructed
- The effects of hazardous materials on the eyes and skin and the appropriate personal protective equipment to be used

Preventing Damage

It is important to ensure all the substance has been washed from under the eyelids, which can be difficult to accomplish when the natural response to eye pain is to tightly close the eyes.

Wearing contact lenses can add to the danger because they may trap chemicals against the eyes, under the contact lens. Therefore, they must be removed to accomplish effective flushing of the eyes.

Any staff suffering an eye injury and any other serious chemical burns should be immediately taken to the emergency room or occupational medical provider for evaluation and potential additional treatment.

Check emergency eyewash stations and shower equipment to ensure staff go home as healthy as when they came to work. ■