

Protective Footwear Basics



Workplace or job site operations expose some or all of your workers to hazards that can injure their feet.

Falling heavy objects, sharp items, hot or cold materials, electric current, hazardous liquids, moisture, & even slippery walking surfaces endanger them. An injury can be expensive. Downtime while an injured worker recuperates can increase your costs.

In some situations you can reduce the likelihood of foot injury by taking simple actions such as moving heavy objects from a top shelf to the floor, picking up nails & other sharp objects at a job site, or providing non-slip gloves so items do not slip out of employees' hands & land upon their feet. These actions may not eliminate the hazards completely; you may need to provide protective shoes or boots for your workers. Several types of protective footwear are available; safety equipment suppliers & some shoe retailers can help you select the best ones for your needs.

When selecting protective footwear, you should:

- **Identify the hazards to your workers' feet, such as:**

- Falling or moving items that compress or crush feet (e.g. bricks, machines)
- Sharp items that puncture soles or other shoe/boot parts (e.g. nails at construction site)
- Electric current that conducts through shoes or boots (e.g. electrician, utility worker)
- Slippery surfaces causing falls (e.g. kitchen worker, car wash or auto garage worker)
- Hot, corrosive, poisonous, or other hazardous items that can enter or penetrate shoes or boots (e.g. welding sparks, molten metal, pesticide or herbicide applicator)
- Temperature extremes that burn or freeze feet (e.g. cold storage worker, asphalt paver)
- Moisture (e.g. custodial worker)
- Stress from standing in place for prolonged times (e.g. cashier, assembly line worker)
- Some workers (e.g. custodians) may be exposed to more than one hazard as they go to various sections of your premises.

- **Provide comfortable shoes/boots that protect against hazards adequately**

Make sure they are not incompatible with materials they will contact

Make sure they fit properly

Choose size based on the person's bigger foot

Choose shoes/boots late in the day, as feet swell later in the workshift

Avoid shoes/boots that need a "break-in"; buy only if comfortable immediately

Try on shoes/boots with the socks typically worn at work

- **Train your workers about:**

The hazards to their feet & the need to use protective footwear

The footwear's limitations (e.g. steel-toed shoes do not stop 1,000 lb. load)

The danger of working without protective footwear

The ways to maintain protective footwear & when to replace it

Your policy requiring their use of protective footwear