

# Standing on Your Own Two Feet

## *And Other Reasons to Use Foot Protection*

*Do you wear safety shoes on the job? If you think you don't need them, consider that about one in five work-related accidents involves the foot and leg. Falling objects cause most of these, but compression, punctures, burns and slipping on wet surfaces are also common. All these accidents are easily prevented by wearing the proper safety shoes.*

### **Style and Comfort**

When you get ready to choose a pair of safety shoes, you are going to be surprised at the options available to you. Today's safety shoes come in a wide variety of types, styles, materials and weights. Many safety shoes look just like street shoes and cost very little more. And they are comfortable! The average safety shoe weighs only 1 1/2 ounces more than street shoes. Let's look at some of the kinds of workplace hazards that you may encounter and the types of shoes designed for them.

### **Mechanical Hazards**

Falling objects, compression from rolling objects, and punctures are easily the top three sources of foot injury, and the ones the standard safety shoe protects against. Typically, your safety shoe will have steel toe caps to guard against injuries from falling objects and compression, and instep protection of aluminum, steel, fiber or plastic to protect the top of the foot. Steel insoles or reinforced metal soles protect from puncture. To protect against slipping on wet or oily surfaces, use wooden soles or cleated, non-slip rubber or neoprene soles. Icy surfaces may require strap-on cleats.

### **Electrical Hazards**

The buildup of static electricity on your body can be dangerous when you are working near explosive or highly flammable substances. Workers in such environments wear safety shoes with leather, cork or other conductive soles and no exposed metal, which could cause sparking. For protection from live electrical current, shoes, including metal parts, must be thoroughly insulated with rubber soles. For high-voltage hazards, use conductive shoes, insulated shoes with a connector from calf to heel to pass electricity to the floor or ground. Electrical-hazard shoes must be kept dry.

### **Extreme Heat or Cold**

In extreme cold wear shoes with moisture-proof insulation and insulated socks. Wooden-soled shoes or slip-on sandals protect against heat; surfaces too hot for wood soles require aluminized heat-protective shoes or boots. When working around molten metal and sparks, use foundry boots with elastic gores for quick removal in case hot metal or sparks get inside.

### **Chemical Hazards**

Many chemicals and solvents can burn or eat away ordinary shoe materials. For protection from these hazards wear rubber, neoprene or plastic footwear, depending on the type of chemical you are exposed to and your company's policy.

### **Other Protection**

Your job may require additional protection, such as metatarsal guards, which cover the top of the shoe for greater protection from falling objects; puncture-proof inserts; shin guards; or metal footguards, which strap over the shoe. Disposable plastic overshoes protect against infection and contamination from sanitation hazards.

### **Your Shoes**

Be sure your safety shoes are approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI)—the rating should be stamped inside your shoe. Choose shoes that you can wear comfortably for hours. For the best protection, keep your shoes clean and dry, and inspect them regularly for cuts, cracks and embedded metal. Replace them when they get worn.

If you follow company rules for safety and protective equipment, stay on the lookout for hazardous conditions and equipment, and wear protective footwear appropriate for your job, you can be sure that you are doing everything.

Preventing workplace injuries is a matter of life and limb. Protect yourself by wearing the right protective footwear for your job. 

