Eye Protection and Contact Lenses

Do you know what the regulations regarding contact lens wearers is?

The 1978 NIOSH Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards, for example, recommended that employees handling chemicals not wear contact lenses; the 2003 guide did not include that recommendation. The latest bulletin from NIOSH, dated June of this year, allows workers handling chemicals to wear contact lenses with little to no restrictions.

Meanwhile, other, more cautious recommendations, voice concerns about the possibility of contact lenses trapping harmful chemicals in the eye, rather than allowing the chemicals to be flushed out properly; concerns about additional chemicals being introduced into the eye when the worker tries to remove the contact lens in a hurry as well as concerns about the contact lens being fused to the eyeball, either from chemical exposure or as a result of exposure to a welding flash.

So what is the rule? What should you do?

The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine has worked to try to answer these questions. Here are their recommendations:

- Establish a written policy,
- Conduct a hazard evaluation,
- Provide training and PPE,
- Notify employees and visitors of denied or restricted areas,
- Notify supervisors and responders of contact lens wearers working in eye-hazardous areas.

Among the Chemicals that you should include in the hazard evaluation are:

* 1,2-dibromo-3-chloropropene (DBCP): OSHA regulation\(^8\)
* 4,4\(^{\prime}\)-methylene dianiline: OSHA regulation\(^8\)
* Ethyl alcohol: Study of absorption by Cerulli, et al. 1985\(^3\)
* Ethylene oxide: OSHA regulation\(^8\)
* Isopropyl alcohol: Study of absorption by Cerulli, et al. 1985\(^3\)
* Methylene chloride: OSHA regulation\(^8\)