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More Than 36,000 American Employees Injured Their Eyes On The Job And Required Time Off From Work

Statistics Show Manufacturing and Production Jobs Have Higher Eye Injury Rates Than Any Other Sector

CHICAGO (Feb. 23, 2006) – New research brings the impact of eye safety at work into sharp focus. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, recently published the results of its latest study of injuries and illness in the workplace. In 2004, 1.3 million American workers were injured on the job and required recuperation away from work. Of that number, 36,680 were eye injuries.

The report also showed that manufacturing or production jobs had the highest eye injury rates, followed by installation, maintenance and repair, and construction. Men comprised 80 percent of the eye injury total and those aged 25-34 reported the most eye injuries. Many of these injuries occurred after being struck by an object or after rubbing the eye once debris had entered it.

The good news is that 90 percent of all job-related eye injuries can be prevented simply by wearing the proper protection. Only eye protection that has been certified by the American National Standards Institute should be used and must have “ANSI Z87” clearly stamped on the frame or lens.

“It is vital for employers and employees to make eye safety a number one priority every single day,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. “Even the most skilled and experienced workers can be involved in an unforeseen accident and have their vision altered forever.”

Because most of these potentially blinding injuries can be prevented, Prevent Blindness America created the Wise Owl program. The program offers safety education materials to employers so their employees are prepared to avoid eye accidents and recognizes companies and individuals who have saved vision through dedication to eye protection.

As of 2003, the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that eye injuries total more than \$300 million a year in lost production time, medical expenses and worker compensation. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires that employers ensure the safety of all employees in the work environment, including providing eye and face protection whenever necessary.

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Eye Injuries in the Workplace are Avoidable With Proper Eye Protection

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Prevent Blindness America has designated March as “Workplace Eye Health and Safety Month” in an effort to raise awareness about the necessity of eye safety on the job. It offers the following tips to promote safety in the workplace:

- Safety eyewear must have “ANSI Z87” clearly marked on all glasses or goggles and should be worn at all times whenever eye hazards are present.
- Workers should know where the nearest eye wash station is at their job site and how to use it.
- Employers should be notified immediately if safety hazards are discovered.
- Employees should have regular eye exams to make sure their vision is adequate to do their jobs safely.
- Those who already have reduced vision should ask their employers if prescription glasses or goggles can be provided.

Prevent Blindness America offers several free fact sheets and brochures to safety managers and consumers including *Eye Safety is No Accident*, *Questions on Eye Safety at Work* and *Workplace Safety Quiz*. Employers may also request information on the *Wise Owl* safety education program by calling 1-800-331-2020 or by visiting www.preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

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