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For more information:
Prevent Blindness America
Sarah Hecker
(312) 363-6035

EYE PROTECTION AT WORK CAN PREVENT PAINFUL INJURIES AND EVEN BLINDNESS

Close to 35,000 American Employees Injured Their Eyes on the Job and Required Time Off From Work

CHICAGO (Feb. 27, 2007) – As millions of Americans head out to work today, they may not realize that their eyesight may be at risk. Buddy and Willie were working on an electrical substation when it exploded. Both employees received second degree burns on their heads and hands. The only part of their faces that was not burned was where their safety glasses were. The glasses most certainly saved their sight. Jay and Jason were at work when they inadvertently struck a 6-foot fluorescent light bulb overhead. Fortunately, both employees were wearing safety goggles, which prevented the falling glass from entering their eyes.

Diana was assisting in the hook-up and removal of a die from a flatbed semi-tractor trailer. She slipped and fell to the ground, where her safety glasses were struck by the end of a pipe. Had she not been wearing her safety glasses, the pipe would have penetrated her eye causing significant damage.

These are just a few of the examples of how imperative eye protection is on the job. In 2005, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, reported that more than 1.2 million American workers were injured and required recuperation away from work. Of that number, 34,740 were eye injuries.

The report also showed that painful chemical burns were the most common eye injury, followed by cuts, lacerations and punctures. But beyond the emotional and physical toll of these injuries is the financial one. In 2003, the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that eye injuries totaled more than \$300 million a year in lost production time, medical expenses and worker compensation.

The good news is that 90 percent of all job-related eye injuries can be prevented simply by wearing the proper protection. In order to encourage employers and employees to work together to practice eye safety on the job, Prevent Blindness America has designated March as "Workplace Eye Health and Safety Month." The national non-profit group has also created the Wise Owl[®] Eye Safety Recognition Program. Beyond providing safety education materials to employers to help their employees avoid eye accidents, the program also recognizes companies and individuals who have saved vision through dedication to eye protection. In fact, since 1948, the program has recognized more than 86,000 individuals for following eye safety procedures and saving their sight by wearing approved protective eyewear.

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Taking Care of the Eyes at Work is Essential for Every Job

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“Whether you’re on a job site or working behind a desk, it is so important to protect one of your most valuable assets— your vision,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America.

Although most eye injuries occur in manufacturing, production and construction industries, those that work with computers for long periods of time may also notice changes in their vision. Computer screens give off little or no harmful radiation, but workers who use them every day may feel their eyes are sore, irritated or fatigued. Prevent Blindness America offers these tips to help create a more comfortable workspace:

- Place your computer screen 20 to 26” away from your eyes and a little below eye level to ease neck strain and to help keep your eyes from drying out.
- Change the lighting to lower glare and harsh reflections.
- Take breaks to stretch, stand up and rest your eyes to reduce eye and muscle fatigue.
- Try to remember to blink often and keep eye drops at your desk to keep eyes lubricated.
- If you notice any changes in your vision, see your eye doctor right away to make sure your eyes are healthy.

Prevent Blindness America offers several free fact sheets and brochures to safety managers and consumers including *Eye Safety is No Accident*, *Workplace Safety Quiz* and *Computers & Your Eyes*. 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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