

# Workplace<sup>TM</sup>

## HR & SAFETY

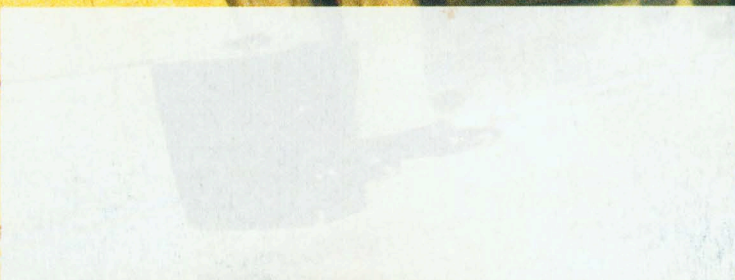
### The **Emerging Workplace Professional**

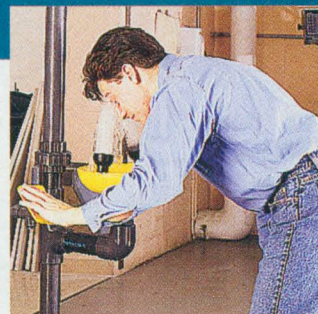
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Users of eyewash systems should seek emergency medical treatment after a 15-minute flush of the eyes at a station.

# HR, safety and health professionals answer readers' questions.

Does an eyewash system protect against all chemicals, or should an assessment be made for treatment beyond the use of an eyewash system?

—N.M., Indianapolis

**E**YEWASH SYSTEMS are the second line of defense after personal protective equipment (PPE) fails or is not sufficient to protect an individual. These units provide first-aid treatment to injured workers regardless of the chemical in question. Using water as the rinsing agent, eyewashes can rinse or dilute almost any chemical with little risk of chemical reaction.

That said, it is critical that a hazard assessment be performed to identify the specific chemicals that exist in an environment and

determine if additional precautions beyond an eyewash system should be taken.

Begin a chemical hazard assessment by reviewing the material safety data sheets (MSDS) for the chemicals being used or stored in the facility. The MSDS is a good resource because it specifies first-aid procedures that should be followed in case of an incident. If additional guidance is needed for a particularly caustic or harmful chemical, consult an industrial hygienist or physician.

It may also be prudent to look at potential interactions between several chemicals within the facility. When chemicals combine, the interaction can produce solutions that are more toxic than the individual chemicals, and a separate

protection and treatment strategy may be necessary. Other considerations are the temperatures and concentrations of the hazardous chemicals.

Next, develop and document a protection strategy. This strategy should consist of personal protective equipment, emergency eyewashes and drench showers, other first-aid procedures, and a communication and evacuation plan.

Note that emergency equipment is a safety tool, not a replacement for emergency medical care. Users should always seek emergency medical treatment after a full 15 minute flush at an eyewash or drench shower station. **W**

Nate Kogler, Product Manager  
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