



Contact Lens Wear

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the American Welding Society has received reports concerning welders who claimed to have had contact lenses fused to their eyes, either by the heat of the arc or by optical radiation. None of these reports has been substantiated. Safety bulletins issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Safety Council (NSC) have refuted such claims.

The American Optometric Association (AOA) has stated that contact lenses may be worn safely under a variety of environmental situations and that evidence refutes the claims that contact lenses negate the protection provided by safety equipment or make the cornea more susceptible to damage by optical radiation, in particular arc flashes.

- Workplace policies limiting the wearing of contact lenses in any given circumstance must be scientifically defensible.
- Restrictions on the wearing of contact lenses by welders may be unreasonable and discriminatory. Restrictions should not be based on perceived hazards, random experiences, isolated unverified case histories or unsubstantiated personal opinions.

GUIDELINES FOR CONTACT LENS USE

The following recommendations are adapted from the statement on contact lens use in eye-hazardous environments by the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM):

- Establish a written policy documenting general safety requirements for the wearing of contact lenses.
- Conduct an eye hazard evaluation in the workplace that includes an assessment of eye-hazardous environments and appropriate eye and face protection for contact lens wearers.
- Provide training on the employer policies on contact lens use and the first aid for contact lens wearers with a chemical exposure. Routinely train medical and first aid personnel in the removal of contact lenses and encourage workers to routinely inspect their contact lenses for damage.
- Provide personal protective equipment including eye and face protection for all workers exposed to eye injury hazards, regardless of contact lens wear.

- Notify visitors and employees of any area where contact lenses are restricted without appropriate eye and face protection.
- Notify supervisors, first aid responders and EMS responders of the contact lens use by workers in eye hazardous environments.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). OSHA news release: *OSHA, Eye Experts Dispel Contact Lens Rumors*. U.S. Department of Labor Office of Information, August 9, 1983.

American Optometric Association (AOA). *Guidelines for the Use of Contact Lenses in Industrial Environments*, available from AOA, 243 N. Lindbergh Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63141; telephone: 800-365-2219; web site: www.aoa.org.

American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM). *Use of Contact Lenses in an Industrial Environment*, available from ACOEM, 25 Northwest Point Blvd, Suite 700, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007; telephone: 847-818-1800; web site: www.acoem.org.