

# Footwear Safety FactSheet

HS05-049A (1-06)



Protective footwear worn in the workplace is designed to protect the foot from physical hazards such as falling objects, stepping on sharp objects, heat and cold, wet and slippery surfaces, and exposure to corrosive chemicals. As a worker, you should know the risks in your workplace and when selecting footwear, consider the safety hazards in your work area. This will help you select the right protective footwear. Ask your supervisor what protective footwear and other personal protective equipment is required. Also, The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standard Z41-1999 “Personal Protection – Protective Footwear” should be consulted. There is also the ANSI Z41 User guide for Protective Footwear.

When purchasing new protective footwear, it’s important to get the right fit and comfort so they will not cause calluses, ingrown toenails, or simply tired feet that are common among workers who spend most of their working time standing or do a lot of walking. Although these may not be considered as occupational injuries, they can have serious consequences for health and safety at the workplace. They can cause discomfort, pain and fatigue. Fatigue can cause a worker an injury affecting the muscles and joints. Also, a worker who is tired and suffering pain is less alert and more likely to act unsafely, which can cause an accident.

Before wearing new shoes or boots on the job, wear them at home until you’re sure they fit well. Keep them clean until it is decided they fit and you are keeping them, that way there should not be a problem exchanging them for a different size or style. Always check the store’s return policy prior to purchasing footwear.

## What Should I know about Safety Footwear?

- If you are at risk for foot injury at your workplace, you should wear the appropriate protective footwear.
- If foot protection is required in your workplace, your employer should implement a complete foot safety protection program including: selection, fit testing, training, maintenance, and inspection of footwear.
- Safety footwear is designed to protect feet against a wide variety of injuries. Impact, compression, and puncture are the most common types of foot injury.
- Choose footwear according to the hazards in your workplace.
- Ensure that the footwear has the proper sole for the working conditions.
- Use metatarsal protection (top of the foot between the toes and ankle) where there is a potential for injury.

## What Built-in Protection Features Come in Safety Footwear?

- High-cut shoes or boots provide ankle support and keep sparks, molten metals, and chemicals from getting into the footwear.
- Reinforced safety toe, reinforced toecap, or steel toecap footwear will absorb the blow if a heavy object falls on the foot.
- Reinforced metal soles protect feet from punctures.
- Steel midsoles protect the foot against penetration by sharp objects.
- Non-slip footwear prevents the wearer from slipping on certain surface type.
- Insulated footwear provides protection in cold temperatures.

## Are there Special Shoes or Boots for Special Working Conditions?

- Metal-free footwear is recommended when working around electricity.
- Footwear with rubber or wooden soles is recommended for traction on wet floors.
- Treated footwear is recommended because it is resistant to chemicals and corrosives.

## What Should I Know About the Fit and Care of Safety Footwear?

### **Fit:**

- Walk in new footwear to ensure fit and comfort.
- Shoes/boots should have ample toe room (toes should be about ½ inch from the front).
- Make allowances for socks or special arch supports when buying shoes/boots.
- Shoes/boots should fit snugly around the heel and ankle when laced.
- Lace up shoes/boots fully to ensure comfort.

### **Care:**

- Apply a protective coating to make footwear water-resistant.
- Inspect footwear regularly for damage.
- Repair or replace worn or defective footwear.

## How Should I Care for My Feet?

Feet are subject to a great variety of skin and toenail disorders. Workers can avoid many of them by following simple rules of foot care:

- Wash feet daily with soap, rinse thoroughly and dry, especially between the toes.
- Trim toenails straight across and not too short. Do not cut into the corners.
- Wear clean socks or stockings and change them daily.

Some feet sweat more than others and are more prone to athlete's foot. Again, following a few simple guidelines may help:

- Select shoes made of leather or canvas—not synthetic materials.
- Keep several pairs of shoes on hand and rotate shoes daily to allow them to air out.
- For some workers, non-colored wool or cotton socks may be recommended since dyes may cause or aggravate skin allergies.
- Use foot powder.
- See a doctor for persistent ingrown toenails, calluses, corns, fungal infection and more serious conditions such as flat feet and arthritis.

Remember to practice safety; don't learn it by accident.

This fact sheet was published with information from the Houston, Texas Parks and Recreation Department; Simon Fraser University; the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety; the American Standards Institute; and the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) and is considered factual at development