



Evolution of the Workplace

Did you know that since OSHA came into existence in the early 70's that the workplace has changed in many ways?

Since OSHA's establishment in 1971, many new safety standards have been created or amended and many different types of PPE have been developed or improved upon. Some of the changes that have occurred include:

- Technological changes
- New exposures (change to Silica Standard is a recent example)
- Job growth in isolated environments (i.e., in-home health care)
- Changing workforce—higher number of older workers, women, and immigrants
- Increased use of contract employees and temp agencies
- Decreasing ability to voice safety concerns to employers—decline in organized labor

In 1980, union membership density stood at 23 percent of the work force; some 40 years later, just over 11 percent of American workers belong to unions.

Today's workplace is different in that there is not always a clear relationship between a well-defined employer and a worker. Many functions, such as hiring, training, and supervision are handled by multiple individuals or departments making the responsibility of risk management more challenging. OSHA's goal through all of these changes has remained to be protecting workers to the highest extent possible. OSHA continues to place focus on making sure that companies:

- Are aware of what potential hazards can exist
- Emphasize communication, education, and training
- Utilize the proper PPE when necessary
- Keep good records and incident reports

In regards to PPE, many individuals in today's workplace place some importance on appearance and style. While it is always important that all PPE is used properly and fits correctly when it is needed, workers will be more likely to use PPE in some case if it is appealing in appearance and style. An example would include selecting a pair of stylish safety glasses over a lower cost safety glass with a "cheap" and "uncool" appearance. Today's workers also have a wider range of body dimensions than ever, so providers of products like fall protection harnesses, gloves, protective clothing (i.e. hi-vis, arc flash), and eye protection must be sure to offer a wider selection of sizes and styles.

All of these changes have raised the importance for employers to regularly assess their safety program and to pay special attention to things such as:

- Proper matching of PPE to the hazard
- Seeking out advice when needed (i.e., Conney Safety Services)
- Involving workers in PPE evaluation and safety program development
- Regular inspection and maintenance
- Training (and re-training)
- Cost vs. performance

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