



RISKCONTROL360^o

Emergency Eyewash & Shower Units

A fair number of companies do not think about the emergency eyewash & shower units until they are needed. At that point it usually is too late to make up for not paying attention to them. The following paragraphs will walk you through the highlights of what is required by OSHA & ANSI (American National Standards Institute).

Emergency eyewash and/or shower units need to be located close to the hazard, but not too close that the hazard would make them unusable. Specifically they must be within 10 seconds of unobstructed travel (usually less than 55 feet). The distance must be reduced if the material is very caustic or corrosive. The units should not be close to electrical equipment, near ramp edges, or where the person has to cross areas where plant vehicles are operating. When locating the units, consider what materials are being used and how hazardous they are. In addition, visualize how someone would get to it with impaired vision. Of course, just like fire extinguishers and other safety equipment, they must be free of obstructions. This is not free storage space.

Some companies will install eyewash units because there is either a specific or general exposure to dust. There is really nothing wrong with this practice, however, the units must be inspected and maintained.

To make the units easier to locate, they must be marked with a highly visible sign in a well-lit area and the color of the unit must make it stand out from the background. Eyewash units must have dust cover over the wash bowl or individual head covers to keep dust and dirt out of the water stream.

ANSI requires that the units be inspected (flowed) **weekly** for at least 3 minutes. Work out drainage or water capture issues prior to testing. There are large tubs on wheels and shower testers available from your safety equipment vendor. The testing is supposed to verify that the flow pattern is correct and the water runs clear. Stand-alone or self-contained units are not flowed except when emptied to change water. These units have to be drained, cleaned, new bactericide added, and re-filled per the manufacturer's directions, usually every 6 – 12 months.

Don't be fooled by the small bottle units that are being shown or described as eyewash units. Since these units cannot supply the full 15 minutes of flushing required, they can only be used as a first step to get flushing to the eyes so the person can reach a unit that can supply the 15+ minutes of flushing. Also note that the bottles have an expiration date.

Many companies that have emergency eyewash or shower units have not caught up to the requirement to have tepid water flowing through the unit. ANSI specifies that the water must be between 60 – 100 degrees F. The two drivers for the tepid water are: 1) not being too hot or cold so the flushing water does not cause any reactions with the material and most importantly, 2) to keep the person in the flushing stream for the full 15 minutes. A specific blending valve for this purpose must be used as the typical mixing valve will not close off the hot water side if the cold water side fails. In addition to temperature, issues of weather (if outside) and privacy have to be addressed. There are a variety of enclosure and curtained units available from your local safety equipment vendor. Usually these enclosed units have alarms that sound locally and transmit to an occupied area. Those same alarms can be added to units that are not enclosed.



Plumbed units are preferable to self-contained or stand-alone units in terms of the duration of flow and regulating the temperature, but close attention must be paid to control of the shut-off valve. The shut-off valve must be locked in the open position (do not use a lockout lock) and only allowed to be closed when performing maintenance.

Following the steps above will help to keep this valuable equipment ready for the emergency we hope will never happen.

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