

Visual Fatigue: Lighting, Glare and Worker Performance Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Your eyes work hard every shift. When the lighting is bad, too dim, too bright, or full of glare – your eyes strain to compensate, and over time that affects how well you see, how fast you react, and how many mistakes you make. Poor lighting doesn't just hurt your eyes. It hurts your safety.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Most workers don't connect a near-miss or an error to the lighting in their area. But poor lighting is a hidden factor in more incidents than people realize.

Dim or Insufficient Light

When there isn't enough light to see clearly, workers misjudge distances, miss details, and fail to spot hazards like spills, uneven surfaces, or moving equipment. Tasks that require precision, reading labels, operating controls, inspecting materials become error prone.

Glare and Harsh Lighting

- Direct glare from overhead lights or windows forces your eyes to constantly adjust
- Reflected glare off shiny surfaces – screens, metal, wet floors – creates the same problem
- Flickering lights cause eye strain and headaches even when workers don't consciously notice the flicker

Eye Strain and Visual Fatigue Squinting, focusing, and adjusting to poor light all day is exhausting work for your eyes. Visual fatigue shows up as headaches, dry or burning eyes, blurred vision, and difficulty concentrating all of which slow you down and increase the chance of an error or incident.

Screen and Detail Work Workers doing close-up tasks reading gauges, inspecting parts, using computers or tablets are especially vulnerable to visual fatigue when lighting conditions aren't matched to the work.

Shadows in Work Zones

- Poor light placement creates shadows that hide trip hazards, equipment edges, and spills

- Workers may move into shadowed areas with less caution because they can't see what's there
- Loading docks, stairwells, and storage areas are common problem spots

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Better lighting makes you sharper, safer, and less tired at the end of the shift.

Report Poor Lighting in Your Work Area If your work area is too dim, has burned-out bulbs, flickering lights, or glare problems, report it – don't just adapt to it. Workers get so used to bad conditions that they stop noticing them, but their performance suffers the whole time. If you've mentioned it before and nothing changed, mention it again. Bad lighting is a documented safety hazard.

Position Yourself to Reduce Glare

- Angle your screen or work surface so light sources aren't directly in front of you or reflecting off it
- Use blinds or coverings to manage window glare if your area has them
- If you work at a computer, position the screen so windows are to the side – not behind or in front of you
- Anti-glare screen filters can make a real difference for workers doing long shifts at a monitor

Give Your Eyes Regular Breaks

For close-up or screen-based work, follow the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something at least 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. It sounds simple, but it genuinely reduces eye strain over the course of a shift. If your job doesn't allow regular breaks from close work, mention it to your supervisor.

Use Task Lighting When You Need It

- For detailed or precision work, a focused task light is far better than relying on general overhead lighting alone
- Position task lights to illuminate the work surface without creating new glare or shadows
- If task lighting isn't available in your area and you need it, ask – it's a reasonable request and a real safety need

Know the Signs of Visual Fatigue

Headaches, burning or watery eyes, blurred vision, increased sensitivity to light, and difficulty focusing are all signs your eyes are working too hard. If you notice these symptoms during your shift, don't push through. Step away from the task, rest your eyes, and let your supervisor know. If these symptoms happen regularly at work, they need to be investigated – they're your body telling you something in your environment needs to change.

FINAL WORD

Your eyes are one of your most important safety tools on the job. Take care of them. Report bad lighting, give yourself breaks, and don't ignore the signs that your eyes are struggling. A workplace that's well-lit is a workplace where people can see what's coming.
