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**NEARLY 100,000 PEOPLE TREATED IN U.S. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOMS FOR
WORK-RELATED EYE INJURIES – SOME BLINDING**

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. – In 2002, close to 100,000 people were treated in U.S. Hospital emergency rooms for eye injuries related to the workplace, yet this figure actually only represents a small portion of the total number of injuries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, each day, as many as 2,000 workers incur eye injuries related to their jobs. Workplace-related eye injuries happen in a matter of seconds, but taking a few moments to wear the proper eye protection can literally mean the difference between a very minor injury and blindness,” said Daniel D. Garrett, PBA spokesperson. The fact is that more than 90 percent of eye injuries can be prevented, when simple and relatively inexpensive safety precautions are followed.

Industrial-related eye injuries are commonly caused by chemical splashes, metal or plastic debris hitting the eye, tools accidentally striking the face, and improper use of equipment. Eye injuries can even occur in settings that would not typically be associated with any great risk, although these incidents happen less frequently.

John was changing a fluorescent light fixture ballast. While snapping the last tube into place, it exploded, spraying his face with shards of sharp glass. His safety glasses prevented serious injury. Cory was grinding aluminum when a chunk of the metal struck his safety glasses with such force that it embedded in the lens. Had he not been wearing eye protection, his sight may have been severely damaged. Laura was using a compressed air powered staple gun to attach wood to a window frame. The staple struck a knot in the wood, causing the staple to strike her safety glasses. The force of the staple made two holes in the left lens, but Laura’s eyes were fine.

These workers did the right thing and wore proper eye protection on the job. They are just a few of the 86,000 *Wise Owl*® members whose sight may have been saved since the program’s inception. PBA sponsors *Wise Owl*, a safety education program designed to promote the widespread use of approved protective eyewear that meets ANSI Z87 standards.

There is not a one-size-fits-all standard for every industry, so safety managers must assess what types of safety gear to purchase. All safety glasses and goggles should be ANSI Z87.1 certified for industrial eye protection, with the Z87 mark on the frames or lenses. In certain industries, a face shield and goggles should be absolutely mandatory to protect workers from chemical splashes, or welding light and electrical arc.

There are many steps that can be taken in industry to protect one’s eyes. The first step is to assess work areas for accidents that can be caused by impact, heat, chemicals, dust, glare and optical radiation. The second is to have a good, sound safety program in place that mandates 100 percent participation of employees, managers and visitors. The same safety standards should apply to schools with industrial design and trade courses.

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PBA is offering several free fact sheets and brochures to safety managers and consumers: *2002 Workplace-Related Eye Injuries*, *Eye Safety is No Accident*, *Questions on Eye Safety at Work*, and *Workplace Safety Quiz*. To receive this free information, call the PBA Hotline at 1-800-331-2020.

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information on workplace safety, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the web at www.preventblindness.org.

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