

Protecting Eyes and Faces in Cannabis Workplaces

As the cannabis industry matures and diversifies, ensuring workplace safety becomes increasingly critical. One area often overlooked by new operators is eye and face protection—a key component of occupational safety, particularly in cultivation, manufacturing, and lab environments. From airborne particles to chemical splashes, cannabis workers face a variety of hazards that can cause serious eye injuries or facial harm if not properly addressed.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, employers are responsible for providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including eye and face protection, when hazards are present. Cannabis operators, regardless of their facility type or size, must take these responsibilities seriously to protect their employees and avoid costly fines.

Here's what every cannabis business owner and manager needs to know about protecting eyes and faces in the workplace.

Understanding the Hazards in Cannabis Facilities

Eye and face hazards vary across cannabis operations, depending on the setting, tasks, and materials involved. Some of the most common risks include:

1. Chemical Exposure

Cannabis cultivation and processing often involve the use of pesticides, cleaning agents, solvents, and fertilizers. These substances can cause severe irritation or injury if splashed or sprayed into the eyes or on the face.

Extraction labs are particularly hazardous, where volatile solvents like butane, ethanol, or CO₂ are used. Splashes or pressure releases during the extraction process can result in burns or chemical exposure.

2. Airborne Particulates and Plant Debris

Trimming, grinding, and packaging cannabis plants can release dust, pollen, and tiny plant particles into the air. Long-term exposure can lead to eye irritation, allergic reactions, or respiratory problems if particles enter the eyes.

3. UV and Grow Light Exposure

Cannabis cultivators often work under high-intensity discharge (HID) lamps or LED grow lights, which emit strong ultraviolet (UV) or blue light. Long-term exposure without proper protection may cause eye strain, photokeratitis, or other vision problems.

4. Physical and Mechanical Hazards

Tasks involving power tools, trimming machines, packaging equipment, or pressurized systems pose a risk of flying objects or accidental impact. This includes broken glass, metal shards, or other debris.

5. Biological Contaminants

In environments where **mold or bacteria** may be present—especially in poorly ventilated grow rooms—eye protection helps prevent infection or irritation due to exposure.

OSHA Requirements for Eye and Face Protection

Under **OSHA's Eye and Face Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.133)**, employers must:

- Conduct a **hazard assessment** to determine the necessary protective equipment
- Provide **eye and face protection devices** that meet **ANSI/ISEA Z87.1-2020 standards**
- Ensure PPE is **appropriately fitted** and maintained
- Train employees on **how to use, clean, and store** the equipment properly

Additionally, employers must replace PPE that is damaged, scratched, or no longer provides adequate protection.

Failure to comply with these requirements can result in OSHA citations, fines, or legal liability in the event of a workplace injury.

Types of Eye and Face Protection for Cannabis Workplaces

The appropriate type of PPE depends on the specific hazards present in each cannabis facility. Here are the most common forms of eye and face protection:

1. Safety Glasses

Standard safety glasses with side shields are suitable for general protection from flying debris, dust, and light particles. They are ideal for trimming, packaging, or machine maintenance tasks.

2. Goggles

Goggles provide a tighter seal around the eyes and are recommended when there's a risk of chemical splash, vapor exposure, or fine particulate matter. Anti-fog models are ideal for high-humidity cultivation areas.

3. Face Shields

Face shields protect the entire face, including eyes, nose, and mouth, from splashes, impacts, or sprays. They are commonly used in extraction labs, when working with pressurized systems, or while handling hazardous chemicals. Note that face shields should be worn with goggles or safety glasses underneath for complete

protection.

4. UV Protective Eyewear

Cultivators working under UV or blue-spectrum grow lights should wear eyewear designed to block **harmful radiation** and reduce eye fatigue. Tinted or polarized lenses also help prevent long-term retinal damage.

5. Respirators with Eye Shields

In some scenarios—especially when both airborne chemicals and physical eye hazards are present—integrated respirators with face shields or full-face masks may be required.

Conducting a PPE Hazard Assessment

Before selecting protective equipment, cannabis businesses must perform a **formal workplace hazard assessment**, which includes:

- Identifying tasks that pose a risk to eye or face safety
- Determining the type and severity of potential injuries
- Selecting PPE that matches the specific hazard
- Documenting the assessment and updating it as tasks or equipment change

For example, trimming may require basic safety glasses, while ethanol extraction demands chemical-resistant goggles and face shields. Growers exposed to mold should have eye protection with proper filtration.

Employee Training and Education

PPE is only effective if workers know how and when to use it. OSHA requires employers to **train employees** on:

- When PPE is necessary
- What type of PPE is required for each task
- How to properly wear, adjust, and remove it
- How to maintain and store the equipment
- How to recognize signs of wear or failure

Training must be provided **before exposure to hazards** and repeated **annually or when processes change**.

Best Practices for Maintaining Eye and Face Safety

In addition to providing PPE, employers should build a culture of safety around eye and face protection:

- **Post signage** in areas where PPE is required
- **Inspect equipment** regularly for cracks, cloudiness, or strap damage
- Provide **cleaning stations** and disinfectants for shared PPE
- Maintain an **inventory** of replacement parts and backups
- Encourage workers to **report near-misses or incidents**

Employers should also ensure **first aid supplies** are available, including **eye wash stations**, which are mandated by OSHA in areas where hazardous chemicals are used.

Common Compliance Mistakes to Avoid

Some cannabis companies unintentionally violate OSHA's eye and face protection rules by:

- Relying on fashion eyewear or sunglasses instead of ANSI-rated gear
- Allowing employees to choose PPE based on comfort, not hazard level
- Failing to provide protection during cleaning, maintenance, or transport tasks
- Neglecting to include **temporary or contract workers** in PPE training
- Not replacing scratched, damaged, or improperly stored PPE

Safety is a Competitive Advantage

Eye and face protection is not just about compliance—it's about **taking care of your workforce**. In the cannabis industry, where physical labor and chemical handling are common, investing in high-quality PPE and a robust training program can prevent life-changing injuries and foster a culture of responsibility.

As cannabis businesses seek to scale and professionalize, adopting OSHA-compliant practices—especially in areas like eye and face safety—sends a strong signal to regulators, investors, and employees that safety is a top priority. It also reduces downtime, legal exposure, and insurance costs, giving responsible operators a significant edge in a competitive marketplace.

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