

Safety Director's Bulletin

(One in a series of safety information bulletins from your Joint Insurance Fund)

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Work Attire: Long Pants vs. Shorts

From police officers to public works to parks & recreation and to utility crews, many highly skilled employees are required to wear long pants. This rule is not in effect because the employers like how long pants look. Long pants provide a number of safety benefits in the workplace, during recreation and various other activities.

Ultimately **the decision on appropriate work clothing standards and Personal Protective Equipment must be locally determined**, based on management's assessment of the hazards. This is part of the job hazard assessment process. In general, the MEL / JIF Safety Directors are proponents of long pants on the job; for the following reasons:

Machinery: Anyone who works with machinery will be safer if they wear long pants. The machinery can include anything from a lawn mower to a heavy duty welder; drills, saws; construction site equipment, and material transmission equipment, such as pumps and augers. Pants will better protect your legs from being injured from the tools and equipment since they add a layer of protection over your exposed skin.

Bites, Stings and Poison Ivy: Pants protect against bites and stings from insects and venomous creatures. Pants also provide a layer of protection over the legs that may help the wearer avoid contact with poisonous plants, such as Poison Ivy. One of the biggest threats that can be minimized by wearing pants is tick-related diseases. Ticks carry a number of diseases, including Lyme disease, but they have no ability to bite through your pants. Pants also deter mosquitoes, which may carry the West Nile virus, and venomous bites or stings from snakes and scorpions.

Hazardous Materials: Anyone working in hazardous environments, such as cleaning up a hazardous material spill, should wear long pants. Even if the environment is not as obviously dangerous as a hazardous material spill, it can still be dangerous. Examples include cleaning up after a flood or other natural disaster or rooting through the remains of a sewer backup. Pants protect the skin from chemical exposure as well as injury from wayward splashes, pipes, boards, nails and other sharp objects.

Sun Exposure: Long pants protect against the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. Even if the temperatures are sizzling, you will be safer wearing long pants if you are going to be in bright sunlight for extended periods of time. The ill effects of UV radiation run the gamut from wrinkles to possible skin cancer.

Remember that local management is ultimately responsible for putting in place any protective measures, and these must reflect the need for protection from exposure; especially where those hazards can readily be identified. Decisions regarding proper work attire and requirements for PPE must be based on hazard assessments and sound judgment.

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