See the value of high visibility

Low-visibility in jobsites (such as road construction work zones) is an industry-recognized occupational hazard. Whether visibility dangers exist during the daytime due to the surrounding area and conditions or conversely during nighttime projects, high-visibility garments can reduce these hazards and create a safer working environment.

Industry research has shown that "fatal highway incidents [has] remained the most frequent type of fatal workplace event, accounting for one in every four fatalities nationally in 2005," according to the most recent census report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

ANSI/ISEA 107-2004 outlines industry safety standards that should be taken based on the potential hazards, the tasks required of workers, the particular jobsite, and nearby vehicular traffic. In addition, the standard details the types of high-visibility safety apparel appropriate for the particular type of use.

Changes to the standards

The current standard made a significant number of changes from the 1999 edition including the use of headwear as a high-visibility accessory and logos made of reflective patterns. These regulations become effective at the end of 2008 as a result of the Federal Highway Administration adopting 23 CFR Part 634: Worker Visibility, which requires all workers exposed to traffic or construction equipment along a federally funded highway to wear high-visibility safety apparel that meets ANSI Class 2 or 3 specifications.

ANSI Class 2 garments should be used when greater visibility is needed and when the worker is close to vehicular traffic traveling 25 mph or more. Garments that fall into this category include vests and T-shirts that feature a horizontal retroreflective band that encircles the torso and optional vertical trim that defines the human form.

For the highest level of visibility needed when workers face serious hazards and are frequently diverted

ANSI/ISEA 107-2004 includes the use of company logos in reflective patterns on high-visibility garments. Photo: 3M

from their work, ANSI Class 3 covers more of the body and further defines the human form. Two horizontal bands around the torso as well as two horizontal bands on both the arms and legs are needed to meet Class 3 specifications. This type of apparel must be worn when traffic speeds exceed 50 mph and is recommended for all highway construction workers.

Conducting a hazard assessment can help identify what garment will work best for the specific jobsite, surrounding hazards, weather conditions, and vehicular traffic and speed.

Dress for success

Choose the right garment for the job, keeping in mind that comfort increases the probability that it will be worn by workers. An International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA) study on compliance indicated that vests are not worn 25% of the time because employers do not enforce use, the garment lacks style or comfort, it hampers job performance, it is forgotten at home, or it is soiled or torn.

Material used in the traditional vest now is being abandoned for more modern options that double as work clothes. Ultra-lightweight knit fabrics are designed to keep the body cool during the summer months, while a variety of garments made for colder weather remain lightweight, comfortable, warm, and insulated.

Other high-visibility garments available include short- and long-sleeved shirts, shorts and pants, gloves and headgear, and jackets and parkas to meet any jobsite need—no matter the weather conditions—all while complying with the ANSI 107 standard.

As with any piece of work material or equipment, high-visibility garments should be inspected regularly to ensure that the background color has not faded and the garment maintains its reflective properties. Workers should be encouraged to properly clean the garments after extended use to remove dirt and grime.

Be proactive

Becoming familiar with the new regulations now before they fully take affect can help you make the right purchasing choices for the type of work your company frequently does as well as provide the appropriate training for your employees. For more information on ANSI/ISEA 107-2004, visit ISEA's Web site at www.safetyequipment.org.

— *Kate Hamilton*