

Safety Eyewear From a Manufacturer's Perspective

KURT DAEMS IS FOUNDER AND CEO OF WOLF PEAK INTERNATIONAL, A SAFETY EYEWEAR MANUFACTURER IN LAYTON, UT.

In this interview, Daems provides an inside look at approaches to safety eyewear from a manufacturer's perspective.



Kurt Daems

MPS: Please provide a brief description of your professional background and of your position with Wolf Peak.

KD: I am founder and CEO of Wolf Peak International, which designs and manufactures the brand Edge Eyewear. I have been researching, designing,

testing, marketing and educating in the safety eyewear industry for 12 years, including extensive collaborated efforts with ANSI-accredited laboratories.

MPS: On average, how many occupational eye injuries occur annually in the U.S.? Are these injuries on the rise or decline?

KD: With a little research, one will find a myriad of statistics from many different sources that have conducted studies and produced a variety of results. However, we typically rely on reports produced by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), which have proven to be quite consistent with other top-rated research companies.

According to these reports, it is estimated that approximately 10,000 eye injuries occur each day in the U.S. Of those, 9,000 are less serious, such as getting something small in the eye, which is quickly washed out, but the

other 1,000 require medical attention and result in taking at least one day off work. This is the concerning statistic. Even more interesting is that 70% of those 1,000 injuries occur off the jobsite in everyday life.

It appears that jobsite injury for professional workers is on the decrease as education and awareness are more available and requisite. Also, safety eyewear has become more comfortable, practical and desirable, which has assisted in the age-old problem of getting people to wear the glasses more often.

On the flipside, many people engaged in homeowner and do-it-yourself projects are not educated and informed of risks that occur with the tools they use and the environmental conditions to which their eyes are exposed. This group is increasingly at risk, and the rise in eye injuries generally occurs in this demographic.

MPS: Which industries typically experience the highest number of eye injuries and why?

KD: Most eye injuries occur in industries where particles are flying around, such as the mining, machining, manufacturing and drywall industries, or in industries where workers perform functions above their head, such as auto mechanics and electricians. Forty-one percent of eye injuries occur where particles are flying or falling.

MPS: What are the most common occupational exposures that put workers at risk of eye injury?

KD: Much of the accidents within these industries occur because users do not wear the proper eyewear for the job or the glasses have an improper fit. Sometimes people will take off the glasses momentarily to clean the lens or wipe off fog or will get distracted by some menial task in an environment where they think it is not necessary to wear protective eyewear, such as reading a manual, making notes or speaking with another person. This is a high-risk moment.

It should be noted that eye injuries can and do occur to anyone, at any time, in any environment. Most people who have sustained an injury will say, "I never suspected it to happen to me and in that environment, I did not see myself at risk." The greatest risk, according to DOL, is those people who are off the jobsite recreating or doing yard work, etc. who do not see the need for protective glasses or goggles.

MPS: As a manufacturer of safety eyewear, how does Wolf Peak ensure that its products best meet workers' needs? Does Wolf Peak conduct independent research studies or surveys to determine what type of eye protection workers are most in need of?

KD: Twelve years ago, Edge Eyewear revolutionized the world of safety products by being the first company to infuse the unique frame and lens technologies offered in the sporting and fashion world into safety eyewear.

For example, we were the first to introduce polarized safety glasses to the workforce. I mention this to address the question of meeting workers' needs. Workers who operate around high-reflective surfaces, such as water, glass and concrete, will greatly benefit from eyewear that eliminates glare. It has become our mission to offer style, comfort and lens technologies traditionally found only in sport and fashion glasses to get people to: 1) want to wear their glasses more often on the jobsite and 2) get people to wear protective eyewear off the jobsite where 70% of the injuries occur.

Making eyewear with the unique features and benefits that Edge Eyewear offers is the best way to accomplish this task and save eyes. All of our eyewear is frequently tested in an independent ANSI-accredited lab, which has members who sit on the board of the very organization that writes the standard. Our products all comply with current standards, and our quality control program is second to none. However, the standard requires that safety directors and end users have the responsibility to conduct a proper assessment of the working environment and to select the proper eyewear for the job.

Edge Eyewear publishes educational information to help with selection on hang tags, retail counter mats, point-of-purchase displays, catalogues and an interactive website. Our technologies are a result of independent research studies conducted to find the needs of workers in the industry and to provide specific answers to conditions and environments that pose unique risks.

MPS: *Has Wolf Peak ever needed to create safety eyewear to protect against eye injuries that were previously nonexistent or once rare in the workplace?*

KD: Three of our lens technologies were created to solve issues that had previously never been addressed in the safety world. First is our signature creation of polarized safety eyewear. This has made it possible for

workers operating in very reflective environments, such as water, snow, concrete, metal and glass, to reduce cornea and retinal burn with eyewear designed for those environments. Eyestrain and UV damage has been reduced and workers are now using this technology off the jobsite more than ever before and are dramatically reducing recreational eye injuries.

The second technology is that of a blue light filter lens that increases contrast, image definition and depth perception in a dramatic and powerful way. This lens technology offers strength and precision of the optics.

Third is our G-15 technology, which is a lens for those with sensitive eyes. This technology offers a cooling sensation to the eyes and causes them to relax and be more comfortable throughout the day.

MPS: *How does Wolf Peak test its products to ensure proper fit and level of protection?*

KD: The fit of our eyewear is predetermined by our designers who have carefully studied national statistics on average sizing; however, this is not all. Edge Eyewear was also the first company to create a "Fathead Series" specifically designed for those who have a larger head structure. In essence, we created eyewear for the larger head size to address the comfort factor and to ensure a proper fit that keep particles from entering in gaps associated with glasses worn improperly. We also developed a patented technology called Edge Flex that increase flexibility and comfort.

MPS: *How does Wolf Peak ensure that its products comply with the ANSI Z87.1-2003 standard?*

KD: Edge Eyewear has a three-step quality control process. Every batch of eyewear is thoroughly tested at the production facility before it is sent out to our warehouse for distribution. Next, we send every frame style to the aforementioned accredited lab, which is also A2LA-certified for thorough independent testing before any product is released into the market. Finally, Edge Eyewear

has its own in-house random quality control program that gathers a random sampling of products from the market to be sent off for testing on a routine schedule determined by the research and development department. Total and complete compliance in verifiable results by independent labs is our absolute expectation of every model produced.

MPS: *What new approaches to safety eyewear is Wolf Peak currently pursuing? Are these approaches based on industry demand or on an increase in particular eye injuries?*

KD: Edge Eyewear did not invent safety glass but has always led the way in introducing lens and frame technologies the safety world has never seen before. Our specific future plans are confidential and proprietary at this time. We will continue, as in the past, to research the ever-changing workforce and their needs on and off the jobsite and to provide unique protective eyewear infused with technology to keep their eyes comfortable, fashionable and safe.

MPS: *What do you consider to be the most challenging aspect of manufacturing safety eyewear? How does Wolf Peak overcome this challenge?*

KD: We feel the most challenging aspect of manufacturing safety eyewear is that the industry is not properly regulated. ANSI spends much time researching and writing standards, which are set in place as a guideline for manufacturers to produce good quality products that will keep eyes safe. OSHA, at a much later date, eventually adopts these standards.

The problem is that no one is policing manufacturers to abide by these standards and to show proof of compliance. We believe there should be mandatory yearly testing by an independent third-party laboratory of all models offered by each manufacturer. The very thought of this has many of our competitors scared and for good reason. Several manufacturers in the country only rely on over-

seas testing by their production facilities or in-house testing of their own. Both of these are a conflict of interest. Even worse, several brands of safety eyewear have no testing program at all. We see nothing done by OSHA or ANSI to regulate this and to keep products independently tested and compliant. Consumers must have confidence that when they purchase a pair of eyewear, it has been tested to perform as it is supposed to and will protect their eyes.

Do not be fooled into thinking that markings on glasses guarantee compliance either. They are applied

during the manufacturing process overseas long before anything is tested. Testing labs have reported that uneducated manufacturers have even mislabeled the markings on their glasses to show the public compliance, but because they had never been tested, the error in marking had never been caught. If someone is unsure and wants proof, they should challenge manufacturers to produce independent third-party test results or do not buy. All of this causes a challenge for those companies that want to produce a high-quality compliant product as they try to compete with

cheap noncompliant eyewear. Edge Eyewear will continue its independent third-party testing program to support its goal, "Not one eye lost, no, not one!" ☺

Kurt Daems is founder and CEO of Wolf Peak International, which designs and manufactures the brand Edge Eyewear. He has been researching, designing, testing, marketing and educating in the safety eyewear industry for 12 years, including extensive collaborated efforts with ANSI-accredited laboratories. Daems is a member of the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering and ASSE, and he holds dual degrees from the University of Utah in business and marketing.

Now Accepting Safety 2012 Speaker Proposals

All submissions should be sent to ksonneson@asse.org by July 1, 2011.

•**Honoraria:** Individual speakers (one to two speakers per session) receive a full complimentary conference registration. Group/panel presenters receive a complimentary registration for the day on which they speak and a reduced rate for the balance of the conference. Travel, lodging and meal expenses are the speaker's responsibility.

•**Submissions:** The subject line should read "ASSE 2012 and [Sponsoring Practice Specialty and Topic Area]." Receiving sponsorship from your practice specialty for submissions is a great membership benefit so please take advantage of it.

•**Presentation Description:** Describe your presentation and specify expected learning outcomes for attendees. Indicate the session level. Levels are evaluated as follows:

Basic: 2 to 5 years of experience.

Intermediate: 6 to 10 years of experience.

Advanced: 10+ years of experience.

Executive: Executive level for senior management.

Maximum length is three pages.

•**Biographical Data & References:** For each speaker, include name, address, education, current position, certifications, designations, qualifications and relevant speaking experience. List phone numbers for three references. List noteworthy publications from the past 3 years. Maximum length is three pages.

•**Brochure Description:** Provide a brief



description (less than 50 words) of the presentation for inclusion in marketing materials.

•**Length of Presentation:** 1 or 1¼ hour (to include 15 minutes for questions).

•**Multiple Submissions:** Two proposals maximum per speaker. Complete a separate application form for each submission.

•**Acceptance:** Notification of acceptance will be mailed by the end of November.

•**Proceedings Paper:** Speakers must submit a paper based on their presentation for the proceedings, which are provided to conference attendees. Details on preparing the proceedings paper are provided upon selection. ☺