

## Eye Injury Prevention Month

### In the Battlefield

Serious eye trauma from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom is the second most common combat injury and follows only hearing loss, with 16 percent of all casualties suffering eye damage ranging from distorted vision to blindness<sup>1</sup>. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Public Health, from Oct. 1, 2001 through Dec. 31, 2011, 97,600 new Veterans with Military-related eye injuries entered the VA health system<sup>2</sup>. To reduce the number of injuries, it is imperative that Service members wear protective eyewear, whenever engaging in tactical operations of any kind, training, or other situations where there is risk of eye injury.

### DoD-Approved Eye Protection

While advances in body armor have increased survivability in combat situations, it is important to remember how vulnerable eyes are to injury. Eyewear from the [Authorized Protective Eyewear List \(APEL\)](#) is proven to prevent ocular injuries and reduce the severity of ocular trauma. It is estimated that over 90% of eye injuries are preventable with the use of proper safety eyewear. Commercial eyewear products, even if marked compliant, do not necessarily meet military impact requirements.

### Daily Protection

The need for eye protection is not limited to combat operations. Service members should use APEL-approved eye protection while performing daily operations required for maintaining a fit fighting force and military readiness. For example, Service members need to use APEL-approved eye protection when in areas with dust or debris, performing activities such as storing and maintaining military supplies, or providing certain health services.

Each situation is unique and Service members should discuss safety concerns with their chain of commanding officers, reference appropriate regulations, and use caution at all times. The [U.S. Army Public Health Command](#) provides helpful resources on its web site for vision conservation and readiness.

The VCE promotes the use of the APEL-approved protective eyewear in theater to prevent ocular injuries and reduce the severity of ocular trauma,

as well as in daily activities to protect this critical but fragile sensory ability. For more information about eye protection within the U.S. military, please visit:

- [Eye Protection - United States Army Public Health Command](#)
- [Authorized Protective Eyewear List \(APEL\) – Program Executive Officer Solider \(PEOS\)](#)

**References:**

- <sup>1</sup>DoD Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center, Medical Surveillance Monthly Report (MSMR), Volume 18, No. 5, Eye Injuries, Active Component, U.S. Armed Forces 2000-2010 pp. 2-7, May 2011
- <sup>2</sup>Wilson, J.R. [Combat Eye Trauma](#) . Defense Media Network.