Foot related injuries are all too common in the workplace, and most could be avoided if employees wore adequate protective footwear. We often think of footwear in terms of style, but safety footwear goes far beyond style – they are an important piece of protective equipment, and must be carefully selected to ensure workers’ feet are adequately protected from the hazards they face on the job. For this reason, manufacturers of quality safety footwear design and develop an extensive range of protective features and options for their products that are tested and certified as meeting relevant safety standards.

MEETING THE NEW ZEALAND STANDARDS
Why should safety footwear meet standards? Safety footwear made in New Zealand and Australia to AS/NZS 2210.3 standards has an extra margin of safety compared to footwear produced in other places. That’s because the standards go beyond basic testing requirements. In Europe, for example, only the finished product is tested.

By contrast, New Zealand standards include specific requirements for laboratory testing of all materials used, as well as verification of the finished unit for each of its safety features. Production processes are also carried out under strictly monitored conditions and audited regularly to eliminate risk. This provides an extra level of security and certainty with regard to product performance.

FOOTWEAR SELECTION
Since there’s no such thing as a single type of safety boot appropriate for every work environment, footwear selection requires careful assessment of its intended use. Incorrect selection can result in personal injury and lost time for the employer. It’s also important to consider wearer comfort factors.

Protective footwear is available in a wide variety of styles, including low, mid and high tops, flat soles or defined heels, boots that slip-on or lace-up, boots that are rugged or sporty, and even boots that are insulated against the cold. Some employers will require a certain style, such as a high-leg boot to protect your lower leg and ankle from exposure. A slip-on boot offers convenience, while a high-leg boot can be firmly laced to provide more ankle support.
CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Your safety boots represent an investment and should be regularly inspected and maintained to keep them comfortable and performing well. Always keep them dry, clean, conditioned and protected.

All types of footwear will benefit from regular cleaning and care. Soils left on safety footwear will accelerate degradation, shortening its useful life. To maximise an effective service life for all types of safety footwear, follow these general guidelines:

• Always clean soiled boots as soon as possible. Clean caked dirt or contaminants from seams and welts using a damp cloth. Strong acids or alkalis can damage leather, as can milk or salt.

• Footwear worn in hot conditions or while performing heavy work may accumulate perspiration from the feet. In this case, footwear should be regularly aired. Where appropriate, select leather uppers rather than synthetics, to provide superior breathability.

• Allow wet boots to dry naturally at room temperature. Force drying will harden and crack leather, causing footwear to be mis-shaped. Fill wet boots or shoes with wadded newspaper to hold the correct shape and allow them to dry naturally.

• It may be helpful to have a second pair of boots and alternate between them. This will allow soiled boots to be cleaned and wet boots to be dried as needed, thus ensuring the longest possible useful service from them.

• After cleaning, especially for leather boots, always use appropriate care products. Polish boots to keep them supple and maintain water resistance.

REPLACEMENT

Even carefully maintained boots will wear out eventually and thus will need replacing. Some occupations can make that happen a lot sooner than others. Safety footwear should be replaced whenever any of the following indications are evident:

• Excessively worn soles or heels. When the tread pattern starts to disappear, so can your traction.

• Make sure the upper is intact. Look for cuts, cracks, abrasions, torn stitching or damaged eyelets.

• Worn or damaged covering on the toe cap, i.e. any steel showing.

• Damaged or missing eyelets or other hardware.

When your protective footwear is beyond maintenance, your feet deserve another pair.

Protective footwear is the last line of defence for foot related injuries. You will probably not wear any other piece of protective equipment as much as you wear your safety boots. Investment in quality footwear and careful care and maintenance will pay you back many times over in personal safety and satisfaction.