

## **SAFETY FOOTWEAR – MEETING THE DEMANDS FOR SAFETY, COMFORT AND STYLE**

*We go behind the scenes with Simon Ash, UK Sales Manager of leading safety footwear manufacturer HAIX, to find out what goes into the design and development of safety footwear and the testing that ensures they meet the high standards of comfort and safety that wearers have come to expect.*

**Q. What do you consider the most important elements in safety footwear? What are today's consumers looking for?**

Without doubt, the most important factor in choosing safety footwear has to be quality and compliance. So, the first questions that consumers should ask are – what are the risks I'm facing at work, does the boot or shoe fully comply with the standards to meet those risks and is it going to keep me safe?

After that, it's definitely now all about the extra elements wearers are looking for; comfort, reliability and style. It's a widely-acknowledged fact that with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), user appeal and acceptance is the key to reducing accidents in the workplace. If you ask someone to wear a pair of uncomfortable, ugly boots or shoes then there is going to be the risk that they will change into their own, comfortable trainers at the earliest opportunity.

**Q. What facilities do you have in-house for quality testing and development?**

We have our own in-house quality assurance programme with the facilities to carry out a number of tests focussing on overall comfort, performance and production quality. Even before the production process begins, we test and evaluate raw materials. Boots can be constructed from up to 130 individual parts as part of an 80-step production process, so it's important that every individual element is of the highest quality.

Our safety boots and shoes undergo a series of over 100 material and quality assurance tests, replicating the day-to-day wear challenges of our customers, who spend most of their time on their feet. For example, Martindale abrasion tests are carried out on upper lining and sole materials in wet and dry conditions. This is coupled with tear-resistance tensile testing to simulate the demands of the working environment, ensuring boots don't fall apart.

**Q. What other quality criteria do you try to meet?**

Although laboratory testing and development is a foundation of any high-quality product, it's our commitment to wearer trials that takes things a step further. We equip users with boots for months at a time to use during their day-to-day routine activities. Performance questionnaires are distributed both during and at the end of the trial, then the user feedback is taken on board, and design changes are made as necessary to better support the wearer's needs.

This has led to some of the unique design elements that you see in our footwear today such as lacing systems that are easy to use and ensure a comfortable fit, material changes to improve durability and outsole designs that improve slip resistance. Above all though wearer trials are vital to improve comfort and fit, as we only know how comfortable a boot is going to be once someone has worn them in their work situation.

**Q. Slips and Trips are still the most common cause of injury in the workplace, how do you address this in the design of your footwear?**

As safety footwear design advances in areas like musculoskeletal support and smarter, lighter and stronger materials, so too is it advancing in combatting the risks of slips, trips and falls. Safety boot sole units are often made from a combination of materials such as Rubber and Polyurethane (PU) that enhance not only durability but also grip, providing stability and reducing chances of slipping, even on surfaces covered in oil or petrol.

Coupled with advanced ground impact cushioning that reduces strain on joints and muscles, designing safety footwear from 'the sole up' will be as integral to future PPE design as it is in today's products.

**Q. Is it difficult to meet safety needs and produce a boot or shoe that looks good, that people want to wear?**

As I mentioned earlier, wearer acceptance is critical to keeping people safe from the hazards they may face at work, so although it is a given that we ensure our footwear meets all the correct standards, style and comfort are top of the list in terms of overall boot design. We pride ourselves on our high level of craftsmanship in the design and production of our products, all of which are made in Europe. We have one of the most modern shoe production plants.

Our product designers are given free rein to use their imagination on new designs, and with our rigorous testing and wear trials we are confident that our designs are some of the most innovative in the market and really meet the needs of today's wearers.

**Q. What trends do you see in the market and how have you adapted your approach to safety footwear design over the years?**

There are arguably few PPE items that are as 'personal' as work boots; protective headwear, eyewear, gloves and high-vis clothing can be removed at various points in a working day, but your work boots are on your feet from the start of a shift until the end.

We are beginning to see how advances in technology, materials, manufacturing techniques and consideration for the individual needs of the wearer, are coming together to produce the next generation of work boots that address long-running concerns around conventional safety footwear.

**END**

**About HAIX®**

Based in Bavaria/Germany, HAIX® is a functional footwear specialist with a worldwide reputation as a "safe brand". Wherever people need high performance footwear that will not let them down, HAIX® has become the brand of choice – in Europe, North America and Asia.

At the company's headquarters and main sales office, HAIX® has established dedicated R&D, design and marketing departments. In the high-tech research and test lab, HAIX® engineers develop new functional features and set new trends and standards for safety footwear. For the production of its top-quality functional boots, HAIX® operates factories in Germany and in Croatia where the company built one of the most modern shoe manufacturing plants in the world.

The HAIX® Group has set up a sales office in Lexington, Kentucky (USA) and employs more than 1300 people all over the world. In 2018, the company produced more than 1.2 million pairs of boots, achieving a turnover of € 120 million. For more information, visit [www.haix.co.uk](http://www.haix.co.uk)

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