

“WE DON’T SELL EYEWEAR!”

By Brenda Fishbaugh



You’ll rarely meet two salon owners more adamant about eye protection than Malibu Tans’ Dennis McCormick and his son, Jim McCormick. “We don’t sell eyewear, we sell eye protection,” Jim McCormick emphatically states. “In our salons, eyewear is optional and eye protection is NOT.”

Dennis continues Jim’s thought. “Eyewear doesn’t sound very serious, but eye protection does. We tell our guests, ‘You can’t go to the tanning room without eye protection,’ and this sounds very serious. If we said, ‘You

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can’t go back to the bed without eyewear,’ our tanners would ignore us.”

The “Dennis & Jim Team” operate large tanning facilities in four states. Jim outlines the Malibu Tan Eye Protection Philosophy (yes, they really call it that!). “Every team member is trained to ask each guest who walks into the store, ‘May I see your eye protection? What lotion will you be using today?’” We recently purchased a new store from a previous owner and our staff was so surprised when the tanners would answer, ‘Hey, you asked me that yesterday.’” To that we respond, ‘Yes, we asked yesterday and we will ask every single time you visit.’” Tanners thought that if they showed us a lotion

bottle and a pair of eye protection once, they could get away without showing us or using it every time. That does not work at our salons.”

After Jim has asked to see a guest’s eye protection, the customer often will try to get out of it. “They’ll ask, ‘Can I just wear this or can I wear that?’, and the answer is, ‘NO, NO, NO – sunglasses are eyewear, tinted fashion glasses are eyewear, contact lenses are eyewear. At Malibu Tan, you must wear FDA-compliant eye protection.’” Jim feels that using the term “eye protection” rather than “eyewear” makes all the difference

in gaining your tanners’ confidence.

Next, Dennis explains, their tanners will comment, “You’re just trying to make money off me.” To this, he emphatically replies, “No – I want you to be protected. I’m selling you something for just \$5, and giving you disposable eye protection for free to use in the stand-ups. This isn’t about money; this is about giving you the best chance to be educated about eye damage and the best chance to wear eye protection.”

“We find that getting a customer is easy,” comments Dennis, but keeping a customer is much more difficult. The only way to keep them is to earn their confidence. We feel when we educate them about eye damage and why we

insist they own their own eye protection or use disposable eye protection, we create a loyal customer who trusts our advice.”

I asked Jim if their strong position on eye protection had cost them some customers. “Maybe we’ve lost a few, but I’d rather lose a few than fight with the state inspectors or have insurance claims from damaged eyes or ‘pink-eye’ from improperly sanitized goggles. If a salon owner is afraid to lose customers, then that shows they are more interested in the money than in standing by a strong education program and strong eye protection philosophy.”

“Imagine if every salon had the same eye protection philosophy we have,” Dennis wistfully says. “If every salon was as emphatic about eye protection as we are, eye burns from a single tanning session would not be the No.1 complaint the FDA receives every year. That could really help keep tanning off the FDA radar, and we would all benefit from that.” ■



About the Author:

Tanning industry veteran Brenda Fishbaugh is president of Eye Pro, Inc., makers of disposable eyewear. She travels extensively training salons on the effects of UV light on vision.

