

LABOUR DEPARTMENT

Occupational Safety and Health Section

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT



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What is Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

'All equipment (including clothing affording protection against the weather) which is intended to be worn or held by a person at work which protects them against one or more risks to their health and safety'.

PPE includes equipment such as safety footwear, hard hats, high visibility waistcoats, goggles, life jackets, respirators and safety harnesses.

Waterproof, weatherproof, or insulated clothing is necessary to protect employees against adverse climatic conditions that could otherwise affect their health and safety.



When to use PPE.

PPE must always be regarded as a 'last resort' to protect against risks to safety and health. Engineering controls and safe systems of work must always be considered first.

For example, it may be possible to do the job using methods that will not require the use of PPE.

If this is not possible, more effective safeguards should be put in place. For example, fixed screens

could be provided rather than individual eye protection.

There are a number of reasons why PPE must be considered as a 'last resort':

- PPE only protects the person wearing it, whereas measures controlling the risk at source protect everyone in the workplace
- theoretical maximum levels of protection are difficult to achieve and the actual level of protection is difficult to assess. Effective protection is only achieved by selecting suitable PPE and if it is correctly fitted, maintained and used
- PPE may restrict the wearer to some extent by limiting mobility or visibility, or by requiring additional weight to be carried. Thus creating additional hazards.

Suitability of PPE.

To be able to choose the right type of PPE, the hazards involved in the task or work environment must be considered carefully. PPE must also meet the needs of the individual.

The following factors should be considered when assessing the suitability of PPE:

- is the PPE appropriate for the risk involved and conditions at the place where exposure may occur? e.g.

goggles are not suitable when full-face protection is required

- does the PPE prevent or adequately control the risks involved without increasing the overall risk? e.g. gloves should not be worn when using a pillar drill, due to the increased risk of entanglement
- can the PPE be adjusted to fit the wearer correctly? e.g. if a person wears glasses, ear defenders may not provide a proper seal to protect against noise hazards
- Has the state of health of those using it been taken into account?
- what are the needs of the job and the demands it places on the wearer? How long will the PPE need to be worn? What are the requirements for visibility and communication?
- if more than one item of PPE is being worn, are they compatible? For example, does a particular type of respirator make it difficult for eye protection to fit properly?



Why should workers wear PPE to protect the whole body?

In some cases workers must shield most or all of their bodies against hazards in the workplace, such as exposure to heat and radiation as well as hot metals, scalding liquids, body fluids, hazardous materials or waste, and other hazards. In addition to fire-retardant wool and fire retardant cotton, materials used in whole-body PPE include rubber, leather, synthetics, and plastic.

Information, instruction and training on PPE use.

Where PPE is provided, employees must be provided with adequate information, instruction and/or training on its use.

The extent of information, instruction and/or training will vary with the complexity and performance of the kit. For example, a full Breathing Apparatus kit will require more training to use properly than a disposable face mask.

Information and instruction should cover:

- the risk(s) present and why the PPE is needed
- the operation (including demonstration), performance and limitations of the equipment
- use and storage (including how to put it on, how to adjust and remove it)
- any testing requirements before use

- any user maintenance that can be carried out (e.g. hygiene/cleaning procedures)
- factors that can affect the performance of the equipment (e.g. working conditions, personal factors, defects and damage)
- how to recognise defects in PPE, and arrangements for reporting them
- where to obtain replacement PPE,

In addition to initial training, refresher training may be required from time to time. Supervisor checks on the use of PPE may help determine when refresher training is required.

Portions of this brochure were extracted from:

www.osha.gov Osha Fact sheet: Personal Protective Equipment

www.healthyworkinglives.com