

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Introduction: Hazards exist in every workplace in many different forms: sharp edges, falling objects, flying sparks, chemicals, noise and a myriad of other potentially dangerous situations. OSHA requires that employers protect their employees from workplace hazards that can cause injury. Personal protective equipment, commonly referred to as "PPE", is equipment worn to minimize exposure to a variety of hazards. Examples of PPE include such items as gloves, foot and eye protection, protective hearing devices (earplugs, muffs), hard hats, respirators, and full body suits.

Controlling a hazard at its source is the best protection. Depending on the hazard or workplace conditions, the use of engineering or work practice controls to manage or eliminate hazards to the greatest extent possible is recommended. For example, building a barrier between the hazard and the workers is an engineering control; changing the way in which employees perform their work is a work practice control. When engineering, work practice and administrative controls are not feasible or do not provide sufficient protection, personal protective equipment must be provided and its use ensured.

The Requirement for PPE — To ensure the greatest possible protection for employees in the workplace, the cooperative efforts of both employers and employees will help in establishing and maintaining a safe and healthful work environment.

Both employers and employees must understand and do the following:

- Understand the types of PPE
- Know the basics to conduct a hazard assessment of the workplace
- Select appropriate PPE for a variety of circumstances
- Understand what kind of training is needed in the proper use and care of PPE

In general, employers are responsible for:

- Performing a "hazard assessment" of the workplace to identify and control physical and health hazards
- Identifying and providing appropriate PPE for employees
- Training employees in the use and care of the PPE
- Maintaining PPE, including replacing worn or damaged PPE
- Periodically reviewing, updating, and evaluating the effectiveness of the PPE program

In general, employees should:

- Properly wear PPE
- Attend training sessions on PPE
- Care for, clean, and maintain PPE
- Inform a supervisor of the need to repair or replace PPE

Selecting PPE — All PPE clothing and equipment should be of safe design and construction, and should be maintained in a clean and reliable fashion. Fit and comfort should be considered when selecting PPE for the workplace. PPE that fits well and is comfortable to wear will encourage workers to use PPE. If several different types of PPE are worn together, make sure they are compatible. If PPE does not fit properly, it can make the difference between being safely covered or dangerously exposed. OSHA requires that many categories of PPE meet or be equivalent to standards developed by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). ANSI has been preparing safety standards since the 1920s, when the first safety standard was approved to protect the heads and eyes of industrial workers.

Employers are required to train each employee who must use PPE. Employees must be trained to know at least the following:

- When PPE is necessary
- What type of PPE is necessary
- How to properly put on, take off, adjust, and wear the PPE
- The limitations of PPE types
- Care, maintenance, useful life, and disposal of PPE

Conclusion: Personal Protective Equipment should always be worn when required to safeguard against workplace hazards. Employers should make sure that each employee demonstrates an understanding of the PPE training as well as the ability to properly wear and use PPE before being allowed to perform work requiring the use of the PPE. If an employer believes that a previously trained employee is not demonstrating the proper understanding and skill level in the use of PPE, that employee should receive retraining.

NOTICE: *These guidelines do not supersede local, state, or federal regulations and must not be construed as a substitute for, or legal interpretation of, any OSHA regulations.*

