

HEALTH & SAFETY INFORMATION SHEET 14

Personal Protective Equipment

The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at Work Regulations 1992, amended 2002, follow sound principles for the effective and economical use of PPE, which all employers should follow. However, many employers are already familiar with these principles, and if they are already applying them in their workplace these Regulations will require them to do little, if anything, more than they do at present.

What is PPE?

PPE is defined in the Regulations as 'all equipment (including clothing affording protection against the weather) which is intended to be worn or held by a person at work and which protects him against one or more risks to his health or safety', eg safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses. Waterproof, weatherproof or insulated clothing is subject to the Regulations only if its use is necessary to protect employees against adverse climatic conditions that could otherwise adversely affect their health or safety.

Provision and use of PPE

The main requirement of the PPE at Work Regulations 1992 is that personal protective equipment is to be supplied and used at work wherever there are risks to health and safety that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways. However, where PPE is the only effective means of controlling the risks of injury or ill health, then employers must ensure that it is available for use at work - **free of charge**.

Assessing suitable PPE

To allow the right type of PPE to be chosen, the different hazards in the workplace need to be considered carefully. This will enable an assessment to be made of which types of PPE are suitable to protect against the hazard and for the job to be done. Your supplier should be able to advise you on the different types of PPE available and their suitability for different tasks. It may be necessary in a few particularly difficult cases to obtain advice from specialist sources - and of course from the PPE manufacturer.

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

- Is it appropriate for the risks involved and the conditions at the place where exposure to the risk may occur?
- Does it prevent or adequately control the risks involved without increasing the overall level of risk?
- Can it be adjusted to fit the wearer correctly?

- Has the state of health of the wearers been taken into account?
- What are the needs of the job and the demands it places on the wearer?
- If more than one item of PPE is being worn, are they compatible?

Training

Make sure the user is aware of why PPE is needed, when it is to be used, repaired or replaced and its limitations. Instruct, train, and supervise its use. Because PPE is the last resort after other methods of protection have been considered, it is important that users wear it all the time they are exposed to the risk. Never allow exemptions for those jobs which take '*just a few minutes*'. Check regularly the use of PPE and investigate fully any reasons for non-use.

Maintenance

Equipment needs to be well looked after and be properly accommodated when not in use, for example, stored in a dry, clean cupboard, or in the case of smaller items, such as eye protection, in a box or case. It should be kept clean and in good repair - the manufacturer's maintenance schedule (including recommended replacement periods and shelf lives) should normally be followed. Simple maintenance can be carried out by the trained wearer, but more intricate repairs should only be done by specialist personnel.

New PPE

PPE needs to have been 'CE' marked in accordance with the requirements of the amended Personal Protective Equipment (EC Directive) Regulations 1992. The CE mark signifies that the PPE satisfies certain basic safety requirements.

Other Regulations

- The PPE at Work Regulations do not apply where PPE is provided under other existing Regulations, ie. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999, Noise at Work Regulations 1989 etc.

Key points to remember

Are there ways (other than PPE) in which the risk can be adequately controlled, eg engineering controls?

If not, check that:

- PPE is provided;
- it offers adequate protection for its intended use;
- those using it are adequately trained in its safe use;
- it is properly maintained and defects reported;
- it is returned to its proper accommodation after use.

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