

Are You Protected At Work? Use of PPE

Hard hats, safety glasses, goggles, face shields, ear plugs, ear muffs, steel-toed shoes, respirators, gloves, chemical aprons- What do all these items have in common? They are all forms of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is required in the workplace to protect employees/workers from safety & health hazards that cannot be eliminated through engineering, work practice, and/or administrative controls. Personal protective equipment should be used in conjunction with all other safety devices that may be provided by the machine/tool manufacturers. PPE is provided by the company for employee safety and health in the workplace to reduce health hazards, not circumvent safety guards. In other words, do not take the guards off of saws or disconnect the dust collection system, and expect to be protected from possible health hazards with a pair of safety glasses and a dust mask alone. Personal protective equipment is designed to create a barrier against workplace hazards and afford another level of protection.

Company management is dedicated to the safety and health of employees and evaluates the workplace for hazards periodically. Where hazards cannot be eliminated, PPE is usually provided to workers. The company has an overall responsibility to ensure that personal protective equipment be “provided, used, and maintained in a sanitary and reliable condition whenever it is necessary.....” to prevent injury, according to safety Best Practices and OSHA regulations.

PPE is not gimmick items to be worn at work; employees should take use and training seriously, read the directions for PPE use & maintenance, and ask for assistance from supervisors if there is uncertainty. Improper wearing of PPE or failure to properly maintain PPE further jeopardizes an employee’s health and safety and provides a false sense of security.

Using personal protective equipment requires hazard awareness and understanding of training on the part of the user. Employees must be aware that the equipment does not totally eliminate all the hazards. If the equipment fails, exposure will occur. To reduce the possibility of failure, PPE must be properly fitted and maintained in a clean and serviceable condition. Selection of the proper personal protective equipment for a job is important. Employers and employees must understand the equipment’s purpose and its limitations. The equipment must not be altered or removed even though an employee may find it uncomfortable simply because it does not fit properly.

Remember, PPE is to further protect workers from safety & health hazards. It is not to hinder the worker but to provide protection from the hazardous work processes. With proper PPE, proper training, and proper maintenance of equipment, workers can lead a more healthy and productive life.