

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Your Practical Guide



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Introduction

As part of the risk assessment programmes to identify hazards and evaluate the risks to health and safety in the workplace, it is vital to take appropriate measures that will reduce those risks to an acceptable level.

One such measure is personal protective equipment (PPE) which should be used to protect employees who are exposed to risks that cannot be eliminated or controlled by other means.

The priority, however, must always be to minimise the risk itself. PPE should therefore be regarded either as a last resort, or as an interim measure until other means of controlling the risk can be implemented.

Hierarchy of Control

A health and safety assessment of the workplace will normally identify a hierarchy of possible control measures. Some measures will be essential; others may be relevant only if more effective measures prove impossible to implement. PPE should be relied on as a protection against health and safety risks only after engineering controls and safe systems of work have been found inadequate as a means of controlling the risks. In some circumstances, PPE will be deemed essential and it must then be used or worn by all employees whose health and safety are at risk.

What is PPE?

PPE includes all equipment and clothing intended to be worn or used by a person at work, that gives protection against one or more health and safety risks – for example:

- aprons, gloves, safety footwear, safety helmets and high visibility jackets
- clothing designed to protect against adverse weather conditions
- protective equipment including eye protection, life jackets, respirators, breathing apparatus and safety harnesses

PPE does not include clothing or equipment required under specific regulations such as:

- Control of Lead at Work Regulations
- Ionising Radiation Regulations
- Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations
- Noise at Work Regulations
- Construction (Head Protection) Regulations.

(For example, hearing protection covered by the Noise at Work Regulations and respiratory equipment covered under other legislation do not fall within PPE. More specific requirements are detailed in these regulations).

PPE also excludes:

- uniforms, ordinary work clothes, clothing for food hygiene purposes
- cycle helmets, crash helmets and motor cycle leathers for use on public highways.

Selecting Suitable PPE

Where it is necessary to provide PPE, careful thought needs to be given to the type of clothing or equipment that will be suitable.

To be effective, PPE must:

- be appropriate for the particular health or safety risk(s)
- be appropriate for the working environment
- meet the ergonomic requirements of the wearer
- take account of ergonomic requirements and the state of health of the person(s) who may wear it, and to the characteristics of the workstation of each such person
- be adjustable within its designed range
- fit the wearer correctly
- prevent or adequately control the risk to the wearer
- not increase the overall risk to the workplace
- be designed and manufactured to an approved standard (e.g. HSE/CE).

PPE Assessment

To help select suitable PPE, a final assessment should be made to ensure:

- the health and safety risks definitely cannot be controlled by other means
- the PPE has the correct characteristics to make it effective against these risks
- the PPE is appropriate for the risk(s) involved, the conditions at the place where exposure to the risk may occur, and the period for which it is worn
- that any PPE provided is compatible with other PPE that is either in use, or that an employee would be expected to wear simultaneously
- the PPE itself does not create further risks or add to the risks that have already been identified.

A useful exercise is to list the characteristics that an ideal piece of equipment would need to have to minimise the risks to health and safety. The features of any proposed PPE can then be compared against the list.

Competent Person

All PPE assessments should be undertaken by a competent person who has suitable training and relevant knowledge. This person should also have practical experience of the equipment being used.

In most cases assessments can be undertaken in-house but where complicated or highly technical PPE is needed, it is advisable to seek specialist help.

Maintenance, Cleaning, Storage and Replacement

In addition to providing suitable PPE, it is necessary to make arrangements for it to be maintained in an efficient working order and in good repair. This includes correct storage, cleaning and replacement as necessary. This ensures that the PPE is hygienic and otherwise free of risk to health.

Information, Instruction and Training

Those people who are required to use PPE need to be given information, instruction and training to enable them to understand:

- the risks to their health and safety which the PPE is designed to reduce
- the circumstances in which the PPE is to be used
- what steps need to be taken – maintenance, cleaning etc. – to ensure that the PPE remains an efficient form of protection
- that information relating to the use of the PPE is kept available as a source of reference to employees
- that where appropriate, and at suitable intervals, demonstrations (training) are organised in the wearing of PPE.

An employer is also required to ensure

- the proper use of PPE
- that the employees who use PPE comply with the requirements of the relevant legislation.

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