



Safety Bulletin 71

Personal Protective Equipment

Employers have duties concerning the provision and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) at work.

PPE is equipment that will protect the user against health or safety risks at work. It can include items such as safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses. It also includes respiratory protective equipment (RPE).

What is PPE so important?

Making the workplace safe includes providing instructions, procedures, training and supervision to encourage people to work safely and responsibly.

Even where engineering controls and safe systems of work have been applied, some hazards might remain. These include injuries to:

- the lungs, e.g. from breathing in contaminated air
- the head and feet, e.g. from falling materials
- the eyes, e.g. from flying particles or splashes of corrosive liquids
- the skin, e.g. from contact with corrosive materials
- the body, e.g. from extremes of heat or cold
- PPE is needed in these cases to reduce the risk.

What do I have to do?

Only use PPE as a last resort!

If PPE is still needed after implementing other controls (and there will be circumstances when it is, eg head protection on most construction sites), you must provide this for your employees free of charge. You must choose the equipment carefully (see selection details below) and ensure employees are trained to use it properly, and know how to detect and report any faults.

How do I maintain PPE standards?

PPE must be properly looked after and stored when not in use, eg in a dry, clean cupboard. If it is reusable it must be cleaned and kept in good condition.

Think about:

- using the right replacement parts which match the original, eg respirator filters
- keeping replacement PPE available
- who is responsible for maintenance and how it is to be done
- having a supply of appropriate disposable suits which are useful for dirty jobs where laundry costs are high, eg for visitors who need protective clothing

Employees must make proper use of PPE and report its loss or destruction or any fault in it.



Monitor and review

- Check regularly that PPE is used. If it isn't, find out why not
- Safety signs can be a useful reminder that PPE should be worn
- Take note of any changes in equipment, materials and methods – you may need to update what you provide

Types of PPE you can use

Eyes

Hazards

Chemical or metal splash, dust, projectiles, gas and vapors, radiation

Options

Safety spectacles, goggles, face screens, face shields, visors

Note

Make sure the eye protection chosen has the right combination of impact/dust/splash/molten metal eye protection for the task and fits the user properly

Head and neck

Hazards

Impact from falling or flying objects, risk of head bumping, hair getting tangled in machinery, chemical drips or splash, climate or temperature

Options

Industrial safety helmets, bump caps, hairnets and firefighters' helmets

Note

Some safety helmets incorporate or can be fitted with specially-designed eye or hearing protection
Don't forget neck protection, eg scarves for use during welding
Replace head protection if it is damaged

Ears

Hazards

Noise – a combination of sound level and duration of exposure, very high-level sounds are a hazard even with short duration

Options

Earplugs, earmuffs, semi-insert/canal caps

Note

Provide the right hearing protectors for the type of work, and make sure workers know how to fit them
Choose protectors that reduce noise to an acceptable level, while allowing for safety and communication
Hands and arms



Hazards

Abrasion, temperature extremes, cuts and punctures, impact, chemicals, electric shock, radiation, vibration, biological agents and prolonged immersion in water

Options

Gloves, gloves with a cuff, gauntlets and sleeving that covers part or all of the arm

Note

Avoid gloves when operating machines such as bench drills where the gloves might get caught
Some materials are quickly penetrated by chemicals – take care in selection, see HSE's skin at work website
Barrier creams are unreliable and are no substitute for proper PPE
Wearing gloves for long periods can make the skin hot and sweaty, leading to skin problems. Using separate cotton inner gloves can help prevent this.

Feet and legs

Hazards

Wet, hot and cold conditions, electrostatic build-up, slipping, cuts and punctures, falling objects, heavy loads, metal and chemical splash, vehicles

Options

Safety boots and shoes with protective toecaps and penetration-resistant, mid-sole wellington boots and specific footwear, e.g. foundry boots and chainsaw boots

Note

Footwear can have a variety of sole patterns and materials to help prevent slips in different conditions, including oil - or chemical-resistant soles. It can also be anti-static, electrically conductive or thermally insulating

Appropriate footwear should be selected for the risks identified

Lungs

Hazards

Oxygen-deficient atmospheres, dusts, gases and vapors

Options – respiratory protective equipment (RPE)

Some respirators rely on filtering contaminants from workplace air. These include simple filtering face pieces and respirators and power-assisted respirators

Make sure it fits properly, eg for tight-fitting respirators (filtering face pieces, half and full masks)

There are also types of breathing apparatus which give an independent supply of breathable air, e.g. fresh-air hose, compressed airline and self-contained breathing apparatus

Note

The right type of respirator filter must be used as each is effective for only a limited range of substances
Filters have only a limited life. Where there is a shortage of oxygen or any danger of losing consciousness due to exposure to high levels of harmful fumes, only use breathing apparatus – never use a filtering cartridge
You will need to use breathing apparatus in a confined space or if there is a chance of an oxygen deficiency in the work area



Whole body

Hazards

Heat, chemical or metal splash, spray from pressure leaks or spray guns, contaminated dust, impact or penetration, excessive wear or entanglement of own clothing

Options

Conventional or disposable overalls, boiler suits, aprons, chemical suits

Note

The choice of materials includes flame-retardant, anti-static, chain mail, chemically impermeable, and high-visibility

Don't forget other protection, like safety harnesses or life jackets

Emergency equipment

Careful selection, maintenance and regular and realistic operator training is needed for equipment for use in emergencies, like compressed-air escape breathing apparatus, respirators and safety ropes or harnesses.

You can find the relevant guidance for you [here](#).

Should you require any further assistance or guidance around the use of Personal Protective Equipment, please contact us on info@wpsafety.co.uk or 01268 649006



Source: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)