

# OSHA FACT Sheet



## Personal Protective Equipment

### What is personal protective equipment?

Personal protective equipment, or PPE, is designed to protect employees from serious workplace injuries or illnesses resulting from contact with chemical, radiological, physical, electrical, mechanical, or other workplace hazards. Besides face shields, safety glasses, hard hats, and safety shoes, PPE includes a variety of devices and garments such as goggles, coveralls, gloves, vests, earplugs, and respirators.

### What are your responsibilities as an employer?

OSHA's primary PPE standards are in *Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)*, Part 1910 Subpart I, and equivalent regulations in states with OSHA-approved state plans, but you can find PPE requirements elsewhere in the General Industry Standards. For example, 29 *CFR* 1910.156, OSHA's Fire Brigades Standard, has requirements for firefighting gear. In addition, 29 *CFR* 1926.95-106 covers the construction industry. OSHA's general PPE requirements mandate that employers conduct a hazard assessment of their workplaces to determine what hazards are present that require the use of PPE, provide workers with appropriate PPE, and require them to use and maintain it in sanitary and reliable condition.

Using PPE is often essential, but it is generally the last line of defense after engineering controls, work practices, and administrative controls. Engineering controls involve physically changing a machine or work environment. Administrative controls involve changing how or when employees do their jobs, such as scheduling work and rotating employees to reduce exposures. Work practices involve training workers how to perform tasks in ways that reduce their exposure to workplace hazards.

As an employer, you must assess your workplace to determine if hazards are present that require the use of PPE. If such hazards are

present, you must select PPE and require employees to use it, communicate your PPE selection decisions to your employees, and select PPE that properly fits your workers.

You must also train employees who are required to wear PPE on how to do the following:

- Use PPE properly,
- Be aware of when PPE is necessary,
- Know what kind of PPE is necessary,
- Understand the limitations of PPE in protecting employees from injury,
- Don, adjust, wear, and doff PPE, and
- Maintain PPE properly.

### Can PPE protect workers from head injuries?

Yes. Hard hats can protect your employees from head impact, penetration injuries, and electrical injuries such as those caused by falling or flying objects, fixed objects, or contact with electrical conductors. Also, OSHA regulations require employers to ensure that workers cover and protect long hair to prevent it from getting caught in machine parts such as belts and chains.

### How can PPE protect workers from foot and leg injuries?

In addition to foot guards and safety shoes, leggings (e.g., leather, aluminized rayon, or other appropriate material) can help prevent injuries by protecting employees from hazards such as falling or rolling objects, sharp objects, wet and slippery surfaces, molten metals, hot surfaces, and electrical hazards.

### Does PPE help protect workers from eye and face injuries?

Yes. Besides spectacles and goggles, PPE such as special helmets or shields, spectacles with side shields, and faceshields can protect employees from the hazards of flying fragments,

large chips, hot sparks, optical radiation, splashes from molten metals, as well as objects, particles, sand, dirt, mists, dusts, and glare.

## What can PPE do to protect workers from hearing loss?

Wearing earplugs or earmuffs can help prevent damage to hearing. Exposure to high noise levels can cause irreversible hearing loss or impairment as well as physical and psychological stress. Earplugs made from foam, waxed cotton, or fiberglass wool are self-forming and usually fit well. A professional should fit your employees individually for molded or preformed earplugs. Clean earplugs regularly, and replace those you cannot clean.

## Should workers wear PPE to help prevent hand injuries?

Yes. Workers exposed to harmful substances through skin absorption, severe cuts or lacerations, severe abrasions, chemical burns, thermal burns, and harmful temperature extremes will benefit from hand protection.

## Why should workers wear PPE to protect the whole body?

In some cases workers must shield most or all of their bodies against hazards in the workplace, such as exposure to heat and radiation as well as hot metals, scalding liquids, body fluids, hazardous materials or waste, and other hazards. In addition to fire-retardant wool and fire-retardant cotton, materials used in whole-body PPE include rubber, leather, synthetics, and plastic.

## When should workers wear PPE for respiratory protection?

When engineering controls are not feasible, workers must use appropriate respirators to protect against adverse health effects caused by breathing air contaminated with harmful dusts, fogs, fumes, mists, gases, smokes, sprays, or vapors. Respirators generally cover the nose and mouth or the entire face or head and help prevent illness and injury. A proper fit is essential, however, for respirators to be effective. All employees required to wear respirators must first undergo medical evaluation.

## How can I get more information?

You can find more information about PPE, including the full text of OSHA's standards, on OSHA's website at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov). In addition, publications explaining the subject of PPE in greater detail are available from OSHA. *Personal Protective Equipment* (OSHA 3077) and *Assessing the Need for Personal Protective Equipment: A Guide for Small Business Employers* (OSHA 3151) are available on OSHA's website. For more information about personal protective equipment in the construction industry, visit <http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/constructionppe/index.html>.

To file a complaint by phone, report an emergency, or get OSHA advice, assistance, or products, contact your nearest OSHA office under the "U.S. Department of Labor" listing in your phone book, or call **(800) 321-OSHA (6742)**; teletypewriter (TTY) number is (877) 889-5627. To file a complaint online or obtain more information on OSHA federal and state programs, visit OSHA's website at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies, or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements or carry the force of legal opinion. For compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to *Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations*. This information will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 693-1999. See also OSHA's website at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

