

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

1.0 What is Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

The *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* (the Act) defines personal protective equipment as “any clothing, equipment and substance designed to:

- Be worn by a person; and
- Protect the person from risks of injury or illness”.

Examples of personal protective equipment include:

- Hearing protective devices, such as ear muffs and ear plugs;
- Respirators;
- Protective eyewear, such as goggles;
- Safety helmets and wide brim sun hats.

2.0 Where does the use of PPE fit in the Risk Management Process?

The use of personal protective equipment (and administrative controls) is lowest on the list of Control priorities. These controls should not be relied on as the primary means of risk control until the options higher in the list of control priorities have been exhausted.

3.0 Duty to Provide PPE

If personal protective equipment has been identified as one of the control measures to minimise exposure to a risk, the employer must make sure such equipment is provided. The actual arrangements made for the provision is a matter of negotiation by the workplace parties. Some of the factors which may be considered in deciding upon the most appropriate arrangements for a particular workplace include:

- The availability of the equipment;
- Whether the item can generally be used outside work, such as sunglasses or boots;
- The need for personal fit;
- Provisions in the relevant industrial award regarding provision.

Training should be provided and instruction in the use of personal protective equipment to ensure that workers receive the desired level of protection from the equipment.

4.0 PPE as a Control Measure

Use of personal protective equipment should only be considered as a control measure when exposure to the risk can not be reduced in any other way. Use of personal protective equipment can be regarded as a temporary or interim measure until further controls are put in place. Personal

protective equipment can also be used effectively in conjunction with other measures to manage exposure to a risk.

5.0 Ensuring Protection

To make sure that the item of personal protective equipment will provide the level of protection that it is designed to, make sure that:

- The *appropriate* item is **selected**;
- Workers (and others at the workplace) are **instructed** how to use it;
- Workers (and others at the workplace) **wear** and/or **use** it in accordance with instruction received;
- It **fits** correctly; and
- It is properly **maintained** and **stored**.

6.0 Limitations of PPE

There are general problems associated with the use of personal protective equipment, which can make it a less desirable control option. In some circumstances, for example, personal protective equipment can:

- Be uncomfortable to wear;
- Make working difficult. For example, it can be difficult to do fine or detailed work when wearing certain types of gloves;
- Create a secondary risk not identified in the original assessment. For example, some items of personal protective equipment can hinder the body's natural cooling mechanisms by preventing evaporation of perspiration; and
- It can also be difficult to monitor the level of protection provided by the personal protective equipment.

Further, the use of personal protective equipment is often an expensive option in the long term when the costs of maintenance, supervision and (potentially more) injuries are taken into account.

7.0 Selection Of PPE – General Principles

When selecting personal protective equipment for a particular work process or series of tasks, consider the following general principles:

- Be familiar with the risks of the work process. This will involve evaluating the nature of the risk, and the circumstances and restrictions of the tasks to be performed.
- Be aware of the acceptable level of risk to which the worker may be exposed and hence the performance requirement of the chosen equipment. Compare performance requirements with the capability of different types of personal protective equipment.

- Make sure that the item chosen is appropriate to the risk. That is, make sure that the item selected will provide an adequate level of protection against the risks present and will not create additional health or safety concerns.
- Where several types of personal protective equipment are required to control multiple risks presented by the one work process make sure that the items are compatible, for example, ear muffs with a hard hat.
- Make sure that the item will fit properly, as ‘inadequate fit’ can limit an item’s protective capability. Respiratory protective equipment, for example, requires a good facial seal. (In some instances, facial hair can interfere with the fit of an item.) Your selection decision can be influenced by whether the item needs to be individually fitted by a professional.
- Consider workers’ medical conditions, which can influence whether they can use certain items of equipment.
- Consider the comfort of the item when choosing equipment. Comfort is an important factor in ensuring its use.
- Make sure that the item is worn correctly. Equipment is more likely to be worn correctly if it is easy to use and/or wear.
- Consult with those workers and others who must wear the equipment when choosing the item(s). Where practical, consider worker’s individual characteristics and preferences for styles of equipment. (This should not, of course, result in the level of protection being reduced.) Involving the users of the equipment in the selection process should enhance user acceptance.
- Give preference to items of personal protective equipment, which comply with the relevant Australian Standard (or overseas specification).

8.0 Using PPE – Use According to Instruction

Items of personal protective equipment must be used in accordance with accompanying instructions, to ensure the desired level of protection is gained. The manufacturer or supplier of the equipment should provide instructions about how to use (and fit) the item of equipment. Additional information about use and fit for a particular item of equipment can be found in the relevant Australian Standards (or overseas specifications).

9.0 Training In Use

All workers exposed to workplace risk should be trained in safe work practices. They must be taught the correct way to use any personal protective equipment required to be worn. Where items of personal protective equipment are to be worn by non-workers at a workplace, provide sufficient instruction to ensure these items of equipment are correctly used. Personal protective equipment training needs can be separated into induction, more specific job training and ongoing training.

10.0 Induction Training

General information about personal protective equipment should form an integral part of a workplace’s induction training program for its new workers. This training should cover

arrangements for the provision, use, storage and maintenance of personal protective equipment as well as emergency procedures in the case of special risks, for example chemical spills or fires.

11.0 Specific Job Training

Training for specific jobs involves providing information about the risks associated with the job as identified through the risk management process. Specific job training should also provide instruction in the use of personal protective equipment required for the job, including:

- Recognition of the need for personal protective equipment;
- Basic design principles of the equipment;
- Correct use and wearing of personal protective equipment, as specified by the manufacturer or supplier and/or in the relevant Australian Standard;
- Comfort and fit requirements;
- Application and effectiveness of a selected item;
- Limitations in use, including any limit on the duration for which it can be safely used;
- Maintenance and replacement procedures, as specified by the manufacturer or supplier, and/or in the relevant Australian Standard; and
- Safe working practices and procedures to follow when the equipment is being used.

12.0 Ongoing Training

Ongoing or refresher training should be provided periodically to ensure that personal protective equipment is continuing to be used properly. Training should also be provided to workers when work practices and/or equipment are up-dated.

13.0 Signage

Signs should be posted in conspicuous locations at the workplace wherever it is necessary to use personal protective equipment. These signs serve as a useful reminder of the kind of personal protective equipment that should be worn.

14.0 Storage and Maintenance of PPE

Store personal protective equipment in a clean and fully operational condition. Storage arrangements should ensure that the equipment is safe from interference and damage, and that it is easily accessible when needed. Items of personal protective equipment should also be checked regularly, as specified by the manufacturer or supplier, to determine that they are in a serviceable condition, both during storage and in use.

14.1 Maintenance

Maintain personal protective equipment in a condition that ensures its continued effective operation. Repair or discard damaged or defective personal protective equipment. Institute a

program to ensure that your personal protective equipment is being properly maintained. As part of the maintenance program, determine and record:

- Maintenance duties and responsibilities;
- Designation of personnel;
- Storage procedures;
- Cleaning procedures;
- Checking procedures;
- Information about the duration of protection from gloves, respiratory canisters, etc; and
- Criteria for replacement.