

# Personal Protective Equipment

The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (PPE Regulations) introduce minimum health and safety requirements for selecting, providing, maintaining and using PPE at the workplace. PPE must be supplied and used at work wherever there are risks **that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways.**

## Employers duties

The employer has duties to:

- assess the risks and PPE intended to be issued to ensure that it is suitable
- maintain, clean and replace PPE
- provide storage for PPE when it is not being used
- ensure that PPE is properly used
- give training, information and instruction to the workers on its use and how to look after it.
- provide PPE free of charge

## What is PPE

PPE is defined as all equipment and clothing which is intended to be worn or held by a person at work and which affords protection against one or more risks to health or safety. This includes clothing designed to protect against adverse weather conditions.

Protective clothing includes, aprons, gloves, safety footwear, safety helmets and high visibility jackets.

Protective equipment includes eye protectors, safety harnesses, and respirators.

The PPE Regulations do not apply to processes covered by other Regulations, where there is a more comprehensive requirement for provision and use of PPE: the Noise at Work Regulations or the COSHH Regs

## Provision of PPE (Regulations 4 and 5)

Except where risks are adequately controlled by other means, employers must provide suitable PPE to employees who may be exposed to those risks (Reg 4). The employer should consider PPE as a last resort, or as an interim solution to a risk of exposure pending control by engineering or other means.

The reasons are:

- PPE only protects the person wearing it and not others in the vicinity;
- wearing PPE may give a false sense of security as it is seldom fully effective and
- PPE can be cumbersome which may give rise to other risks or adversely affect performance.

Examples of processes that may require the provision of PPE, subject to an assessment by the employer include the following.

## Head protection:

- construction and building, particularly in the vicinity of scaffolding
- work near hoists, lifting plant and cranes.

## Eye protection:

- handling chemical substances such as acids, alkalis and other corrosive or irritant substances
- working with abrasive wheels or any machine likely to eject particles
- during welding operations where intense light may otherwise cause damage to the eye.

## Hand protection:

- handling chemical substances where there is a risk of dermatitis or of damage to skin tissue
- during construction and outdoor work
- where there is a risk of cuts or abrasions
- where articles may be hot, cold or slippery
- where there is a risk of electrical shock
- when using vibratory tools.

## Foot protection:

- to prevent injury from falling objects
- where special slip-resistance is required
- where there is a risk of sharp objects piercing the sole, such as in the use of nails on a construction site.

## Body protection:

- warm clothing when working outdoors in low temperatures, or in cold-stores
- protection against intense heat and/or flame retardant clothing when working at a foundry, or with welding equipment
- high visibility clothing when working in the vicinity of moving traffic, airports, etc

## Information and training

Employers must take all reasonable steps to ensure that PPE is properly used. This includes giving proper and adequate information, instruction, training and supervision, and the use of disciplinary procedures where appropriate. Where there is a statutory requirement for PPE to be used, this should be indicated by use of safety signs to BS 5378. These are in the form of a blue circle upon a white background (see SAFETY SIGNS).

## No charges

Section 9 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states: "No employer shall levy or permit to be levied on any employee of his any charge in respect of anything done or provided in pursuance of any specific requirements of the relevant statutory provisions."

Section 9 applies to the PPE Regulations because they impose a "specific requirement" on the employer to provide PPE, where a risk assessment has judged it to be necessary.

## Suitability

To be suitable, PPE must:

- be appropriate for the risk(s) involved and the conditions at the place where exposure may arise
- take ergonomic considerations into account, and be capable of being fitted to, and used by, the worker
- so far as is practicable, prevent or adequately control the risk of exposure without creating overall risk
- be designed and manufactured to an approved standard.

Where more than one sort of PPE has to be used simultaneously, each must be compatible with the other and full effectiveness must be maintained (regulation 5).

## Assessment

Prior to selecting PPE, the employer or self-employed person must ensure that an assessment has been made to ascertain whether the proposed PPE is suitable (regulation 6).

Employees should be involved in the selection of types and styles of PPE, and should have an informed choice wherever possible. Selection should be made with the individual in mind — what is suitable for one person may be useless for another.

## Maintenance and Storage

PPE must be maintained (eg cleaned, repaired or replaced) in an efficient state (regulation 7). A stock of spare PPE, spare parts and cleaning materials should be kept to facilitate this. Suitable storage should be available to prevent damage to PPE.

## Information, Instruction and Training

Employees must be given adequate and comprehensible instructions, information and training in:

- the purpose for which PPE has been provided
- the risks that it will protect against
- the correct method of use
- the employee's part in ensuring that PPE remains in an efficient state, properly working and in good repair.

## Employee's Duties

Employees are obliged to use PPE in accordance with the instructions and training that they have been given (regulation 10). Where an item of PPE becomes defective or is lost, the employee must report the loss or defect immediately to the employer (regulation 11).

## Action Points

1. Ensure that the employer considers other control measures before PPE is brought in, pointing out to the employer that PPE is a 'last resort'.
2. Use your rights to be consulted on the selection of PPE to ensure it is a suitable protection against the risk.
3. Ensure that there is a review programme which considers other control measures and does not rely on PPE.

4. Use your rights to be involved in the planning and organisation of training in the theory and practical use of PPE.