

Employers have basic duties concerning the provision and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) at work. PPE is defined in the Regulations as 'all equipment (including clothing affording protection against the weather) which is intended to be worn or held by a person at work and which protects him against one or more risks to his health or safety', e.g. safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses.

Hearing protection and respiratory protective equipment provided for most work situations are not covered by these Regulations because other regulations apply to them. However, these items need to be compatible with any other PPE provided.

What do the Regulations require?

The main requirement of the PPE at Work Regulations 1992 is that personal protective equipment is to be supplied and used at work wherever there are risks to health and safety that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways. The Regulations also require that PPE:

Is maintained and stored properly.

Is provided with instructions on how to use it safely, and is used correctly by employees.

Assessing suitable PPE

To allow the right type of PPE to be chosen, carefully consider the different hazards in the workplace. This will enable you to assess which types of PPE are suitable to protect against the hazard and for the job to be done. Consider the following when assessing whether PPE is suitable:

Is it appropriate for the risks involved and the conditions at the place where exposure to the risk may occur? For example, eye protection designed for providing protection against agricultural pesticides will not offer adequate face protection for someone using an angle grinder to cut steel or stone.

Does it prevent or adequately control the risks involved without increasing the overall level of risk?

Can it be adjusted to fit the wearer correctly?

Has the state of health of those who will be wearing it been taken into account?

What are the needs of the job and the demands it places on the wearer? For example, the length of time the PPE needs to be worn, the physical effort required to do the job and the requirements for visibility and communication.

If more than one item of PPE is being worn, are they compatible? For example, does a particular type of respirator make it difficult to get eye protection to fit properly?

The hazards and types of PPE

Eyes

Hazards: chemical or metal splash, dust, projectiles, gas and vapour, radiation. Options: safety spectacles, goggles, face shields, visors.

Head

Hazards: impact from falling or flying objects, risk of head bumping, hair entanglement. Options: a range of helmets and bump caps.

Breathing

Hazards: dust, vapour, gas, oxygen deficient atmospheres. Options: disposable filtering face piece or respirator, half or full face respirators, air fed helmets, breathing apparatus.

Protecting the body

Hazards: temperature extremes, adverse weather, chemical or metal splash, spray from pressure leaks or spray guns, impact or penetration, contaminated dust, excessive wear or entanglement of own clothing. Options: conventional or disposable overalls, boiler suits, specialist protective clothing, e.g. chainmail aprons, high visibility clothing.

Hands and arms

Hazards: abrasion, temperature extremes, cuts and punctures, impact, chemicals, electric shock, skin infection, disease or contamination. Options: gloves, gauntlets, mitts, wrist cuffs, armlets.

Feet and legs

Hazards: wet, electrostatic build up, slipping, cuts and punctures, falling objects, metal and chemical splash, abrasion. Options: safety boots and shoes with protective toe caps and penetration resistant midsole, gaiters, leggings, spats.

Training

Make sure anyone using PPE is aware of why it is needed, when it is to be used, repaired or replaced and its limitations.

Train and instruct people how to use it properly and make sure they are doing this.

Because PPE is the last resort after other methods of protection have been considered, it is important that users wear it all the time they are exposed to the risk. Never allow exemptions for those jobs which take 'just a few minutes'.

Check regularly that PPE is being used and investigate fully any reasons why it is not. Safety signs can be useful reminders to wear PPE.

Maintenance

Make sure equipment is:

Well looked after and properly stored: When it is not being used, for example in a dry, clean cupboard, or in the case of smaller items, such as eye protection, in a box or case.

Kept clean and in good repair: Follow the manufacturer's maintenance schedule (including recommended replacement periods and shelf lives). Simple maintenance can be carried out by the trained wearer, but more intricate repairs should only be done by specialists.

Make sure suitable replacement PPE is always readily available.

CE Marking

Ensure any PPE you buy is 'CE' marked and complies with the requirements of the Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 2002. The CE marking signifies that the PPE satisfies certain basic safety requirements and in some cases will have been tested and certified by an independent body.

Other Regulations

The PPE at Work Regulations do not apply where the following six sets of regulations require the provision and use of PPE against these hazards. For example, gloves used to prevent dangerous chemicals penetrating the skin would be covered by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended). The regulations are:

The Control of Lead at Work Regulations 2002.

The Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999.

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended).

The Noise at Work Regulations 1989.

The Construction (Head Protection) Regulations 1989.

For more information on the PPE at Work Regulations visit <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l25.pdf> to download the full Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (as amended). Guidance on Regulations.