

# Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

There are multiple ways we can mitigate workplace hazards. The best way is to eliminate the activity/hazard altogether. If that's not possible, we try to substitute the work with a safer method. If this isn't an option, we try solutions like physical barriers, signage, training, and policies to protect workers. But when all else fails, or many times in combination with another control method, we ask employees to wear various types of personal protective equipment. Other safety controls must always be considered and tried before resorting to PPE.



PPE is a product a person wears to minimize the exposure to hazards that can't be controlled at their source.

There are three key concepts for PPE:

- Conducting a hazard assessment
- Selecting PPE
- PPE Training/Care/Maintenance/Useful Life/Disposal

## Hazard Assessment

Before starting, it's critical to have a task and workplace review where the work is to be done in order to identify both the physical hazards (moving objects, fluctuating temperatures, high-intensity lighting, rolling or pinching objects, electrical connections, sharp edges, etc.) and health hazards (overexposure to harmful dusts, chemicals, radiation, etc.). Hazards should be documented and periodically reevaluated throughout the task. Reassessments should not only include the task, but also the changing environment and condition of tools/equipment/PPE. An incomplete hazard assessment often leads to increased risk of injury because hazards aren't addressed by means of PPE or other controls.

## PPE Selection

Once the hazards have been identified and documented, the next step is selecting the appropriate PPE. To encourage proper and consistent use, PPE must be sized appropriately and be comfortable. Protection has been designed for almost every part of the body including eye/face, head, ears, foot/leg, hand/arm, and body. Once hazards are identified, PPE that protects those body parts potentially impacted by the hazards should be selected. For protection to qualify as protective equipment per OSHA, they must meet safety standards established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). For the few exceptions where ANSI standards don't exist (i.e., hand protection), selection should be based on the hazards and the performance characteristics of the particular PPE. In some cases, PPE selection is based on the perceived risks and best judgement. In other cases, PPE is recommended by product or tool manufacturers. It's important to gather all available information for the PPE selection process.

## PPE Training/Care/Maintenance/Useful Life/Disposal

PPE may seem simple, but it's imperative that appropriate training is provided for employees. Not only is training a best practice, it's required by OSHA. Employees should be able to demonstrate the proper wear and use of PPE before they perform the work. Training should then continue according to the manufacturer's recommendations for care, maintenance, useful life, and disposal. In most cases, the PPE manufacturer has identified each of these guidelines. Examples include keeping equipment in a clean/dry place, inspecting PPE for damage before use, considerations for expiration, and clear disposal methods to prevent misuse by another employee. If, at any point, an employee demonstrates improper care, maintenance, use, or disposal of PPE, the individual should be required to complete additional training before returning to work.

For more information on the personal protective equipment requirements set by the Department of Labor, you'll find the construction standard in the OSHA 1926 Subpart E (<https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1926/1926SubpartE>), and the General Industry Standard in the OSHA 1910 Subpart I (<https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910SubpartI>).

