

# Health and safety: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

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## The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations

The PPE at Work Regulations 1992 (enforced January 1st 1993) are part of a series of Regulations implementing EC Directives and their aim is to ensure that certain basic duties governing the provision and use of PPE apply to all situations where PPE is required. These regulations require that PPE:

- Is properly assessed before use to ensure its suitability;
- Is stored and maintained properly;
- Is provided with instructions on safe and proper use; and
- Is used correctly by all employees at all times when exposed to risks.

This article will explain what the Regulations require and how the requirements can be met.

## What is PPE?

PPE is 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/her against one or more risks to his/her health or safety, for example safety helmets, gloves, eye protection high visibility clothing and safety footwear. Ordinary working clothes that do not specifically provide protection against risks to health and safety are not categorised as PPE.

## Provision and use of PPE

PPE should be provided and used at work wherever health and safety risks cannot be adequately controlled in other ways. PPE should not be provided as the primary defence against risks to health and safety due to the fact that its effectiveness can sometimes be compromised by improper use and should be considered as the last resort where other precautions cannot adequately reduce the risk of injury. However, if PPE is the only effective means of controlling health and safety risks, employers must ensure that it is readily available for use at work free of charge.

## PPE and the Self-Employed

The self-employed also have a duty to obtain and use the appropriate PPE wherever health and safety risks cannot be controlled by other measures. However, those

who are only classified as 'self-employed' for tax reasons and work in an employer-employee relationship, the duty to provide suitable PPE will be that of the employer.



## The right equipment for the job

Careful consideration of the different hazards in the workplace is necessary in order to choose the correct PPE. This will enable an assessment to be made of which types of equipment are suitable to protect against the various hazards. Manufacturers and suppliers of PPE will be able to provide information regarding the types of PPE available and their suitability for different tasks.

When assessing the suitability of PPE, an employer should consider:

- Is the equipment appropriate for the risks involved and the working conditions/environment where the risk could occur? For example when using an angle grinder to cut steel or stone, eye protection designed for protecting against agricultural pesticides will not offer adequate face protection.
- Does it prevent or control the risk(s) involved without increasing the overall level of risk?
- Has the state of health of the wearer/user been taken into account?
- Is it adjustable so that it fits the user properly and comfortably?
- Is the PPE compatible with other items of PPE, e.g. if more than one piece of equipment is to be worn/used for example a respirator and eye protection, can both items be worn properly?
- What demands does the equipment place on the user? For example the length of time the equipment needs to be worn, the physical effort required to do the job and the requirements for visibility and communication.

## Training/Awareness

It is important that all users of PPE understand why it is needed, when it is to be used, repaired or replaced, its limitations and where it can be obtained from on site i.e. where it is stored (which must also be readily accessible). Employers should also train employees in the correct use of the PPE and if necessary supervise its use. Users should wear the equipment at all times whilst they are potentially exposed to the risks and it is vital that no exceptions are made for jobs that take 'just a few minutes'. Employers should ensure that PPE is being used

and investigate fully any reasons for 'non-use'. The provision of safety signs can act as useful reminders for employees to use/wear PPE.

### **Maintaining the Effectiveness of PPE**

All PPE must be well looked after and properly stored after use in a dry, clean 'store' or in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations and the store should be clearly labelled indicating its contents. Equipment should be kept clean and in good repair and manufacturers' replacement periods and shelf lives must be observed. Simple maintenance of equipment can usually be carried out by trained users, however, more intricate repairs should only be done by specialist personnel. Replacement PPE must also be readily available in case of loss or damage to equipment to avoid the temptation of completing tasks unprotected or with inadequate protection.

### **Does the equipment meet the requirements?**

All PPE needs to be 'CE' marked in accordance with the PPE Regulations 2002. This CE mark signifies that the equipment satisfies certain basic safety requirements, and in most cases will have been independently tested and certified in accordance with the Regulations.

### **Protection against the Hazards**

#### **EYES:**

**Hazards:** chemical or metal splash, dust, projectiles, gas and vapour, radiation.

**Equipment:** Spectacles, goggles and face shields and visors.

#### **HEAD AND NECK:**

**Hazards:** impact from falling or flying objects, risk of hair entanglement, risk of 'head bumping'.

**Equipment:** a range of helmets and 'bump caps'.

#### **BREATHING:**

**Hazards:** dust, vapour, gas, oxygen deficient atmospheres.

**Equipment:** disposable filtering face-piece or respirator, half/full face respirator, air-fed helmets, breathing apparatus.

#### **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.

**Equipment:** conventional or disposable overalls, boiler suits, specialist protective clothing e.g. chain mail

aprons and high visibility clothing.

#### **HANDS AND ARMS:**

**Hazards:** abrasion, temperature extremes, cuts and punctures, impact, chemicals, electric shock, skin infection and disease/contamination.

**Equipment:** gloves, gauntlets, mitts, wristcuffs and armllets.

#### **FEET AND LEGS:**

**Hazards:** wet conditions, electrostatic build-up, slipping, cuts and punctures, falling objects, metal and chemical splash and abrasion

**Equipment:** safety boots and shoes with protective toe caps and penetration-resistant mid-sole, gaiters, leggings and spats.

The Regulations do not apply to hearing protection and to respiratory protective equipment for most work activities, as these are covered by other regulations. Full guidance on these including selection, use and maintenance are included in the publications L108 Reducing noise at work: Guidance on the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 and HSG53 Respiratory protective equipment at work: A practical guide. Both of these publications are available from HSE Books ([www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk)).

### **Summary**

All employers must ensure that if it is not possible for risks to be adequately controlled other than using PPE:

- PPE is provided to all at risk;
- The equipment offers adequate protection for its intended use and is CE marked;
- Those using/wearing the equipment understand its purpose and are adequately trained in its safe use;
- It is properly maintained and any defects are reported and repaired/replaced; and
- It is returned to storage after use.

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