

Fact Sheet 17: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

■ Background

PPE – a last resort

In many other sections of this IUF manual, there have been descriptions about the ways that employers should identify and assess risks with a view to preventing and/or reducing them. There should be a hierarchy of prevention and control measures – starting with prevention of the risk, and if this is not possible, technical/engineering controls, safe systems of work and information/training should be used instead. Personal protective equipment (PPE) should only be used as a last resort.

Unfortunately, some employers encourage workers to use personal protective equipment without ever considering the introduction of prevention and control measures that could eliminate the use of PPE. This leads to a number of problems:

- PPE protects only the person wearing it, whereas measures controlling the risk at source can protect everyone at the workplace
- theoretical maximum levels of protection are seldom achieved with PPE in practice and the actual level of protection is difficult to assess
- protection is often ineffective because the PPE is not suitable, incorrectly fitted, not properly maintained, and may be used improperly
- PPE may restrict the wearer by limiting mobility or visibility, or by requiring additional weight to be carried. As well as the health and safety problems that this may cause, it can also lead to a ‘blame the worker’ culture when the PPE is discarded because of the discomfort that it can cause
- using PPE in a hot climate can be very uncomfortable for the worker. For example, using a full-face mask and body protection in full sunshine during the hot season can be almost impossible. It can result in dehydration, headaches and even fainting

Types of PPE

Different types of PPE include:

- helmet or head-protector
- hearing protectors such as ear-plugs or ear-muffs
- eye-protectors such as goggles and face shields
- breathing masks with different types of filters
- gloves of different material
- safety footwear
- protective aprons, overalls or clothing
- wet weather protective clothing
- safety belts and life-lines

Hazards

Even where technical/engineering controls, safe systems of work and other techniques have been applied, it is possible that some hazards might remain. These hazards may lead to injuries to the:

- lungs, for example, from breathing in contaminated air
- head and feet, for example, from falling materials
- eyes, for example, from flying particles or splashes of corrosive liquids
- ears and hearing from noise
- skin, for example, from contact with corrosive materials
- body, for example, from extremes of heat or cold

Sometimes, PPE is needed in these cases to reduce the risks, but only to supplement the other risk control measures already put in place.

■ Information

Health and safety law

There is a wide diversity of approaches in national legislation. Check the summaries provided by your union educator of applicable laws in your country.

Agreements

Your union may have made agreements with your employer about the provision of PPE. Check if there are any applicable agreements.

ILO Convention No. 184 Safety and Health in Agriculture

See Articles 6 and 7 in Manual 6 for the employer's duties

ILO Recommendation 192 on Safety and Health in Agriculture

Paragraph 5

To give effect to Article 7 of the Convention, a set of measures on safety and health at the level of the undertaking should include:

- (a) occupational safety and health services;
- (b) risk assessment and management measures in the following order of priority:
 - (i) elimination of the risk;
 - (ii) control of the risk at the source;
 - (iii) minimisation of the risk by such means as the design of safe work systems, the introduction of technical and organisational measures and safe practices, and training; and
 - (iv) in so far as the risk remains, provision and use of personal protective equipment and clothing, at no cost to the worker

Paragraph 7. (2)

In particular, preventive and protective measures to be taken at the level of the undertaking should include: a) adequate personal protective equipment and clothing, and washing facilities for those using chemicals and for the maintenance and cleaning of personal protective and application equipment, at no cost to the worker

■ Trade union action

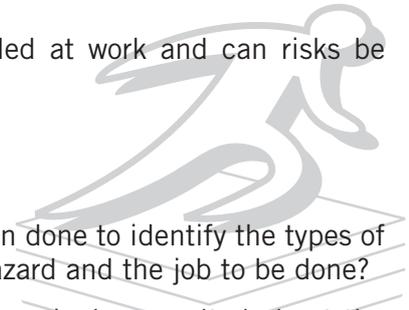
Collective bargaining

Your union can use collective bargaining to overcome any limitations in your country's health and safety legislation. Encourage your union to develop agreements for PPE.



PPE checklist

- ✓ Are health and safety risks adequately controlled at work and can risks be eliminated or reduced without using PPE?
- ✓ Is PPE used only as a last resort?
- ✓ Is PPE provided free of charge?
- ✓ Where PPE is necessary, has an assessment been done to identify the types of PPE which are suitable to protect against the hazard and the job to be done?
- ✓ Are worker HS&E representatives and workers genuinely consulted about the choice of PPE?
- ✓ Do workers have the opportunity to try out different types of PPE?
- ✓ Is the PPE suitable and provided free of charge?
- ✓ Does the PPE comply with quality standards?
- ✓ Is the PPE appropriate for the risks involved and the conditions at the place where exposure to the risk may occur?
- ✓ Does the PPE prevent or adequately control the risks involved without increasing the overall level of risk?
- ✓ Can the PPE be adjusted to fit the wearer correctly?
- ✓ Is the PPE appropriate for women workers?
- ✓ Has the state of health of those wearing the PPE been taken into account?
- ✓ Have the needs of the job and demands it places on the wearer been considered, for example, physical effort and the need to communicate?
- ✓ If more than one item of PPE is being worn, are they compatible?
- ✓ Is there a system of regular maintenance?
- ✓ Is appropriate storage provided for PPE?
- ✓ Is information, instruction and training provided for workers?
- ✓ Do workers know how to use PPE properly?
- ✓ Is there adequate supervision to ensure proper use of PPE?
- ✓ Is there a procedure for reporting loss or defects in PPE?
- ✓ Are worker HS&E representatives and members involved in decisions about the use of PPE?





Trade union action checklist

- ✓ Identify if you have a problem with PPE by doing your own survey or questionnaire with workers that may be affected
- ✓ Do a special HS&E check on PPE with the checklist above
- ✓ Do a special check that concentrates on the employer's assessments of the suitability of the PPE being used, and check whether the assessments are gender sensitive
- ✓ Do a special check that concentrates on the information provided and the health and safety training of workers who use PPE
- ✓ Investigate the systems of work that have been laid down in the employer's health and safety policy and discuss whether they are adequate with your members
- ✓ Decide on the priorities with your members
- ✓ Check the employer's training policy and practice for PPE
- ✓ Ensure that your employer has competent personnel dealing with PPE
- ✓ Make sure that you are consulted before new PPE is brought into the workplace
- ✓ Ensure that the employer's safety policy and systems of work address the use of PPE