Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Hazards exist in every workplace in different forms: sharp edges, falling objects, flying sparks, chemicals, noise and a myriad of other potentially dangerous situations. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) require that employers protect their employees from workplace hazards that can cause injury. Controlling the hazards at the source is the best way to protect employees. When this is not possible, employers must provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees and ensure its use. Personal protective equipment is divided into categories based on areas of the body. OSHA segments these categories into areas such as eye and face, head, feet, and hands.

Employers are responsible for:

- Performing a "hazard assessment" of the workplace to identify/control physical and health hazards
- Providing appropriate PPE for employees
- Providing PPE that meets ANSI specifications
- Training employees in the use and care of the PPE.
- Maintaining PPE, including replacing worn or damaged PPE
- Periodically reviewing, updating and evaluating the effectiveness of the PPE program

Types of PPE: Employers are required to provide the necessary PPE to protect employees in the workplace.

- **Eye & Face Protection**: Safety glasses, goggles, welding shields, face shields
- **Head Protection**: Hard hats (Class A,B,C)
- **Foot & Leg Protection**: Leggings, metatarsal guards, safety shoes/boots, foot/shin guards, toe guards
- **Hand & Arm Protection**: Gloves (leather, aluminized, aramid fiber, synthetic, fabric, neoprene, latex)
- **Body Protection**: Treated wool and cotton, duck, leather, rubberized fabrics, paper like fibers

Employees should:

- Properly wear PPE.
- Attend training sessions on PPE
- Care for, clean, and maintain PPE
- Inform a supervisor of the need to repair or replace PPE

Before usage each time, inspection is a crucial safety step. PPE must be thoroughly inspected each time it is used. Any cracks, breaks, or damage should be reported and the PPE should be discarded if the structural integrity is compromised. Employees must not alter, modify, or personalize respirators or PPE. When not in use, PPE should be stored in a safe location away from chemicals, vapors, and dust. Failure to use and maintain PPE could result in serious injury or death.

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Sources: OSHA Personal Protective Equipment Publication, Gowrie Group.