

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) toolbox talk

A simple, 5 minute outline of what to cover in a toolbox talk on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is safety equipment that is designed to protect employees by reducing their exposure to chemical, biological, and physical hazards while working.

This toolbox talk covers why we use PPE, when PPE should be worn, and the different types of PPE that are available to mitigate worksite risks.

Why run a PPE toolbox talk?

- PPE helps to prevent unnecessary injuries occurring in the workplace
- It reduces exposure to dangerous chemicals
- It reduces the spread of germs and infectious diseases like COVID-19
- It ensures companies adhere to safety regulations and standards
- It improves productivity

When Should PPE Be Worn?

Before PPE is considered for a job, you must first consider whether or not administrative or engineering controls can be put in place to reduce the risks.

Administrative Controls

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does the job even need to be done?
- Can you reduce the risk of exposure to hazardous chemicals or increase physical safety by using more employees to do the job?

Engineering Controls

If administrative controls cannot be implemented or don't fully reduce the risks to an adequate level, then consider engineering controls. Ask yourself:

- Can general ventilation be used instead of requiring staff to wear a respirator?
- Can a wet process be used instead of a dry process to reduce dust?
- Can we install sound-reducing devices to mechanical equipment to reduce noise levels?
- If a job involves working at height, is there a safer height access option?

If both administrative and engineering controls cannot reduce the risks to an adequate level, then PPE will be required.

The 4 Types of PPE

There are four types of workplace safety equipment available depending on the hazard exposure and work conditions.

1) Face and Eye Protection

PPE to protect your face and eyes includes safety goggles and various face shields. It should be used when doing tasks such as spraying chemicals and welding.

Before using face and eye PPE check:

- If safety glasses and face shields comply with the correct protection standards.
- Make sure that the glasses or face shields are not cracked or defective in any way.
- Make sure that the strap on the glasses and face shields are working correctly and fit.
- After using glasses and face shields, they should be cleaned.

2) Respiratory Protection

The second type of PPE is respiratory protection. This includes full-face respirators, gas masks, surgical masks, N95 masks, and self-contained breathing apparatus. Respiratory PPE is used to stop you from breathing in harmful chemicals, gasses, viruses, and other nasty materials.

When using respiratory protection, here are some helpful tips:

- You should undergo the correct training before using the more advanced PPE-like self-contained breathing apparatus.
- Read the instructions on the packet before using any respiratory PPE.
- Replace the respirator filters frequently.
- Disposable masks should be thrown away when you finish using them and shouldn't be shared.
- Don't touch the front of your mask when using it.
- If any PPE is damaged in any way, don't use it.

3) Skin and Body Protection

Skin and body PPE helps protect you from physical hazards.

- **Head Protection.** This includes PPE like hard hats and should be worn when there is any risk of objecting falling onto your head. Always make sure the hat is not defective in any way and has straps that fit you.
- **Body Protection.** This includes PPE like safety vests and various types of full-body suits that are worn to protect you from coming into contact with hazardous substances and from high temperatures. Make sure that the equipment fits you correctly and is not damaged in any way.
- **Hands Protection.** The main form of hand protection is various types of gloves. The specific type depends on the situation. Always make sure that gloves fit your hands properly and are not dirty or defective.
- **Foot Protection.** To help protect your feet, PPE like knee pads and safety boots should be worn. Make sure the shoes or pads fit you correctly, they are not damaged in any way, and they are slip-resistant.
- **Fall Protection.** Fall protection PPE includes safety harnesses and lanyards that are used to protect you from falling. Make sure the equipment is not defective in any way and that they fit you correctly.

4) Hearing Protection

The final type of PPE is to protect your hearing. It includes equipment such as earmuffs and earplugs that are worn to reduce the noise levels you are exposed to.

When using hearing PPE always make sure that:

- They fit into or over your ears correctly.
- Make sure the equipment actually reduces the noise level to a safe level.
- Ensure the equipment is clean and not defective.

Key Takeaways

- PPE is the last line of defense. Before using PPE, try to find an administrative or engineering solution to reduce risk.
- PPE reduces risk, it doesn't eliminate it.
- PPE needs to fit you correctly and should be clean.
- If the PPE is only supposed to be used once, throw it out after using it.
- PPE must be replaced when it wears out and regularly checked that it is in proper working order.
- Some PPE requires you to undergo training before using it.
- PPE only protects you when you are using it!