

# Personal Protective Equipment

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For most work sites a hard hat, safety glasses, gloves, and steel toe boots are the standard Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) worn by employees. In some situations, extra protection is needed for a special type of work being done, such as a face shield to wear while grinding or a respirator for hazardous atmospheres. However, all attempts must be made to eliminate the safety hazard before PPE is used.

But just wearing this equipment isn't enough. Like the old phrase, "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link" PPE only protects you when it's in good condition. If there is a "weak link" in your PPE, the amount of protection offered is reduced. Cracked hard hats or safety glasses, holes in gloves, worn shoe soles, or any kind of damage is just as bad, or even worse, than not wearing any protection at all.

Each day PPE should be inspected thoroughly for any sign of damage. If damage is found, the equipment should be tagged and removed from the work site, disposed of, or destroyed immediately. Usually any attempts to repair PPE will not result in adequate protection. Just get rid of it!

The next step is to make sure the correct PPE is being used for the task involved. As a rule, sturdy boots, a hard hat, and safety glasses should always be worn. When tasks such as grinding create flying particles, a full-face shield should be worn. When working with chemicals, MSDSs should be consulted to determine the necessary protection. If tasks such as sandblasting produce a large amount of dust, the company respirator program should be consulted to determine proper respiratory protection.

Another aspect of PPE is the clothes that you work in. Try not to wear shirts or pants that have large holes or loose threads hanging from them. These are accidents waiting to happen. Tools, usually power tools, can get hung up on holes or twist around loose threads and cause an injury. Cuffs on sleeves or pant legs are easy places for things to get caught or for sparks to fall into and burn. The same goes for jewelry; rings and necklaces are easy catch points. Also, make sure to dress according to the weather. Being too hot or cold can slow down reflexes and alertness.

In general, always be sure of the hazards involved with the tasks at hand and be sure to wear the proper protection. If you are unsure about a hazard or the type of PPE necessary, ask someone who would know. Most PPE-related injuries are due to inadequate or total lack of protection. It doesn't hurt to properly protect yourself.