Personal Protective Equipment Use By Employees

1. Identification of Workplace Hazard

   In certain situations the most appropriate method of protecting employees from occupational hazards is the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Employers should be aware that effective PPE use involves a hazard assessment which determines the need for the equipment, proper device selection and fitting, training employees in its use and monitoring its effectiveness. In addition, certain types of PPE are subject to specific Cal/OSHA standards and regulatory requirements. PPE covered by this Hazard Prevention Data Sheet include head, eye, body, hand and foot protection, respirators, various braces and support for back and joint injury prevention.

2. Management and Trainer Information

   Any time a potential occupational hazard is identified and it cannot be eliminated by changes in equipment (engineering controls) or work practices, personal protective equipment (PPE) may effectively protect employees. However, there are general and specific requirements in Cal/OSHA standards that govern PPE use.

   (1) PPE-Hazard Assessment. As part of the process of PPE selection, the employer needs to formally identify the hazard and prescribe the appropriate type of PPE to be used by employers. Sources of assistance include the employer's worker's compensation insurer’s loss control consultant, the Cal/OSHA consultation service and safety equipment vendors. Employees should be advised of the hazard and the basis for PPE selection in their training.

   (2) General Requirements. PPE used by employees must conform to any national standard established for the type of equipment used, for example, American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The design and condition of the PPE must be sufficient to control the hazard identified. PPE must be properly maintained and kept in a sanitary condition. Interchange of PPE between employees is prohibited unless effectively cleaned between users. It must fit comfortably and not unduly encumber the employee’s movements necessary to perform work. As a general rule, employers are expected by Cal/OSHA to provide PPE at no cost to employees. General PPE requirements are located in the General Industry Safety Orders at 8 CCR §3380.

   (3) Training: Employees who use PPE should be trained with respect to the hazards prevented by the protective equipment, how the device should be fitted and used, limitations associated with the PPE and any employer-specific rules for PPE use and care and safe work practices in Part 3 of this Hazard Prevention Data Sheet.

   (4) Specific Requirements Associated with Certain Types of PPE. The following table presents a summary of the specific requirements contained in Cal/OSHA standards for various types of PPE.

3. Employee Safe Work Practices

   Employees are required to comply with the following safe work practices to the extent applicable.

   (1) Employees shall wear or use all PPE as directed by the employer when workplace hazards are present.

   (2) Employees shall exercise care with respect to PPE provided, including proper adjustment, sanitation, cleaning and safeguarding to assure its continued availability.
(3) PPE should be properly fitted and adjusted during use to assure maximum effectiveness against hazards.

(4) Protective clothing, gloves and other bodily protection must not be worn in a loose fitting manner which could get caught on moving machinery or equipment.

(5) Employees shall immediately report any problem associated with PPE including malfunction, discomfort, ineffectiveness, unsanitary condition or loss.

4. Items Subject to Periodic Scheduled Inspections

If PPE is provided to employees, the following items should be evaluated during periodic scheduled inspections:

(1) Are there hazardous situations observed where employees should be protected by PPE, for example: falling objects (overhead or at foot level), flying projectiles or substances which could enter eyes or contact employees’ bodies?

(2) Are employees wearing or using required PPE in all work areas and tasks where required?

(3) Are employees properly wearing and using required PPE in terms of selection, fit and adjustment?

(4) Is all PPE in use and storage for immediate use, in a sanitary condition and good repair?

(5) Is all PPE designated for emergency use properly stored, identified and tagged with an indication of monthly inspections? Are inspections being performed?

(6) Is respirator use in compliance with the requirements of the Cal/OSHA respirator standard and as described in the employer’s written respirator program?