

Personal Protective Equipment Hazard Assessment

The first critical step in developing a comprehensive safety and health program is to identify physical and health hazards in the workplace. This process is known as a "hazard assessment." Potential hazards may be physical or health-related and a comprehensive hazard assessment should identify hazards in both categories.

Examples of physical hazards include moving objects, fluctuating temperatures, high-intensity lighting, rolling or pinching objects, electrical connections and sharp edges. Examples of health hazards include overexposure to harmful dusts, chemicals or radiation. The hazard assessment should begin with a walk-through survey of the facility to develop a list of potential hazards in the following basic hazard categories:

- Impact
- Penetration
- Compression (roll-over)
- Chemical
- Heat/cold
- Harmful dust
- Light (optical) radiation
- Biologic

In addition to noting the basic layout of the facility and reviewing any history of occupational illnesses or injuries, things to look for during the walk-through survey should include (but not be limited to) the following:

- Sources of electricity
- Sources of motion such as machines or processes where movement may exist that could result in an impact between personnel and equipment.
- Sources of high temperature that could result in burns, eye injuries or fire.
- Types of chemicals used in the workplace
- Sources of harmful dusts
- Sources of light radiation, such as welding, brazing, cutting, furnaces, heat- treating, high-intensity lights, etc.
- The potential for falling or dropping objects
- Sharp objects that could poke, cut, stab or puncture
- Biologic hazards such as blood or other potentially infected material

When the walk-through is complete, the employer should organize and analyze the information so that it may be efficiently used in determining the proper types of PPE required at the worksite. The employer should become aware of the different types of PPE available and the levels of protection offered. It is definitely a good idea to select PPE that will provide a level of protection greater than the minimum required to protect employees from hazards.

The workplace should be periodically reassessed for any changes in conditions, equipment or operating procedures that could affect occupational hazards. This periodic reassessment should also include a review of injury and illness records to spot any trends or areas of concern and taking appropriate corrective action. The suitability of existing PPE, including an evaluation of its condition and age, should be included in the reassessment. Documentation of the hazard assessment is required through a written certification that includes the following information:

- Identification of the workplace evaluated
- Name of the person conducting the assessment
- Date of the assessment
- Identification of the document certifying completion of the hazard assessment

