

Safety Gear Keeps Hazards Clear - Safety Talk Handout

Use of personal protective equipment is not a choice. It is a requirement to ensure worker health and safety.

Employees need to determine where and when personal protective equipment (or PPE) should be used. This is especially the case if the hazards workers are exposed to cannot be reduced or eliminated.

Regulations also require the evaluation and use of personal protective equipment. Perhaps the most notable are those related to bloodborne pathogens and needlestick prevention standards.

There are regulations that cover the use of respirators for protection against exposure to tuberculosis. You may also be required to use hand, head and foot protection, as well as eye and face protection.

What is included among personal protective equipment? Included are respirators and head protectors. Other protective devices include gloves, faceshields and goggles. It is important to use the proper personal protective equipment to prevent exposure to blood and body fluids. In such cases, faceshields, fluid-resistant clothing and gloves are among the protective items that workers should use.

Because bloodborne infections are frequently spread by needlesticks, new personal protective equipment is available. These include needleless devices and devices that cover the sharp end of the needle once the device has been used.

An important part of using PPE is selection of the right piece of equipment and training on how to use it. Sometimes, as when selecting a respirator, a qualified professional needs to be involved in the selection process and the training.

Sometimes the selection of the right personal protective equipment is best left up to the employees who need to wear or use the equipment. This is the case with safety needle devices. In fact, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration require line employee participation in the evaluation and selection of safe needle devices.

Your facility should have a program that is designed to evaluate the hazards present in all work areas and for all employees. Thus workers who care for patients and those who work in the other departments should be included in the hazard analysis that determines which personal protective equipment is right for the job.

Once the evaluation is performed, employees need to be educated and trained on the equipment.

In the case of respirators, whether used for tuberculosis or asbestos protection, there needs to be a training program that includes a medical evaluation and respirator fit testing. During fit testing, employees learn how to wear the respirator properly.