



**SASOM**

South African Society  
of Occupational Medicine

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## THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY OF OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE

### PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

33

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#### SASOM GUIDELINE 33

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# PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 According to legislation the employer shall provide and maintain a healthy and safe working environment.
- 1.2 In every workplace there may be many different hazards, eg sharp edges, falling objects, chemicals, noise, etc. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate a foreseeable risk or exposure to such as risk, the employer must control it. When engineering, work practice and administrative controls are not feasible or do not provide sufficient protection, employers must provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to their workers and ensure its use.
- 1.3 PPE should be selected to provide an adequate level of protection. Overprotection, as well as under-protection, can be hazardous and should be avoided. The use of PPE may itself create significant wearer hazards, eg heat stress and impaired vision and mobility.
- 1.4 The type of PPE and the level of protection necessary should be re-evaluated periodically as the situation changes, eg changes in chemicals, processes, working hours, etc.

## 2. DEFINITION

Personal protective equipment (PPE) refers to protective equipment or garments worn by workers to reduce their exposure to hazards that pose risks to their health.

## 3. TYPES OF PPE

- 3.1 PPE includes the following:
  - 3.1.1 Eye protection (goggles, glasses, visors)
  - 3.1.2 Hearing protection (ear plugs, ear muffs)
  - 3.1.3 Respiratory protection (respirators, face masks, cartridge filters)
  - 3.1.4 Foot and leg protection (safety boots, spats)
  - 3.1.5 Head protection (hard hats)
  - 3.1.6 Body protection (aprons, safety harnesses, chemical suits)
  - 3.1.7 Sun protection (wide rim hats, long-sleeved shirts and trousers)

## 4. DETERMINING PPE

- 4.1 Referring to the ORP process above.
- 4.2 Providing PPE is always the last step in the hierarchy of control processes.
- 4.3 The employer needs to determine the –
  - 4.3.1 source of the hazards;
  - 4.3.2 nature of the hazards (physical, biological, chemical or ergonomic);
  - 4.3.3 duration of exposure to the hazards (long-term, short-term and intermittent exposure)

- 4.3.4 exposure levels to the hazards; and
  - 4.3.5 control of the hazards.
- 4.4 A PPE training programme should form part of the company's health and safety programme. It should include –
- 4.4.1 the reasons for using PPE;
  - 4.4.2 procedures for selection and fitting;
  - 4.4.3 correct use;
  - 4.4.4 maintenance;
  - 4.4.5 storage;
  - 4.4.6 monitoring of use;
  - 4.4.7 training on the above;
  - 4.4.8 compliance with relevant legislation and standards;
  - 4.4.9 the standards the company wants to meet in the use of PPE; and
  - 4.4.10 keeping record of the training of each worker required to wear PPE by the employer.

## **5. SELECTION OF PPE**

- 5.1 PPE must be of safe design and construction.
- 5.2 Employers should take the fit and comfort of PPE into consideration when selecting appropriate items for the worker. PPE that fits well and is comfortable to wear will encourage the worker to use it.
- 5.3 If PPE does not fit properly, it may not provide the level of protection desired, and may discourage worker use.
- 5.4 If several different types of PPE are worn together (eg a scuba may not fit inside a particular chemical protective suit or allow acceptable mobility when worn).
- 5.5 PPE should provide adequate protection for the worker in accordance with the nature and size of the hazard.
- 5.6 It should comply with applicable laws, regulations and standards.
- 5.7 Ease of use and worker acceptance are important.
- 5.8 The duration of time for the PPE to be worn must be taken into account.

## **6. RESPONSIBILITY**

- 6.1 Employers must –
  - 6.1.1 determine the purpose and use of PPE based on the HIRA and ORP;
  - 6.1.2 provide PPE free of charge to all workers and other persons who are at risk;
  - 6.1.3 ensure that the PPE is appropriate for each particular hazard in the workplace;

- 6.1.4 ensure that the PPE is appropriate for each worker and controls the risk for that worker;
- 6.1.5 provide training for supervisors and workers (see par 4.3 above);
- 6.1.8 enforce the proper use of PPE by the workers concerned;
- 6.1.9 ensure that the equipment is provided in a clean and hygienic condition to the person, that it is maintained, cleaned, repaired or replaced when necessary and provide appropriate (individual) storage for PPE;
- 6.1.10 clearly identify areas in workplaces where PPE must be used;
- 6.1.11 periodically review, update and evaluate the effectiveness of the PPE programme;
- 6.1.12 monitor the use of PPE regularly, and health and safety committee members or representatives must do regular inspections; and
- 6.1.13 set the example by also wearing PPE when required.

## 6.2 Workers must –

- 6.2.1 comply with the requirements to wear PPE;
- 6.2.2 not intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health and safety, which includes PPE;
- 6.2.3 take care of PPE and clean and maintain it;
- 6.2.4 wear the PPE in the correct manner;
- 6.2.5 attend training sessions on PPE; and
- 6.2.6 inform the supervisor of the need to repair or replace PPE.

## 7. NON-COMPLIANCE

- 7.1 To promote buy-in and compliance, the PPE policy must be developed in consultation with the workers through the Health and Safety Committee, the Health and Safety representative or other arrangements agreed upon, and, where relevant, the union. If the policy is developed along these lines, it will reduce the risk of industrial action should a worker be disciplined for breaching safety rules or his or her employment be terminated.
- 7.2 If a worker continues to resist wearing or using PPE, the employer could take action such as disciplinary action or moving the worker to another area.
- 7.3 The employer, as well as the worker, could be subject to fines or prosecution for the worker's failure to use PPE.

### NOTE

The SASOM guidelines are active working documents that are reviewed regularly, or as changes take place in legislation, the work or the workplace.

Your inputs and comments are therefore regarded as most valuable. Please send them to [info@sasom.org.za](mailto:info@sasom.org.za).