

# Ill fitting PPE

## WHAT'S AT STAKE

Ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE) is universally problematic in workplace safety and deters workers from performing job-related tasks efficiently and safely. Personal protective equipment is one of the last lines of defense for workers against injuries. However, in certain industries such as construction, women are less fortunate than men when it comes to finding gear that fits properly. The limited availability of PPE designed specifically for the shape of a woman's body has required many to 'make do' with equipment designed for men. Women who work at mostly male sites are often reluctant to draw attention to their safety needs.

## WHAT'S THE DANGER

Personal protective equipment cannot protect a worker from hazards if it does not fit. PPE designed for men may not fit women properly due to differences in body size, height and composition. Unfortunately it seems that major players in the safety world—major manufacturers of uniforms and protective equipment— still have not received the memo and continue to produce “Unisex” work clothing and PPE. Areas of protective equipment that need to be specifically designed for female workers include: head, eye/face, body, hand and foot protection. For example, men's-sized work boots are sized larger and wider than women's sizes. A woman wearing men's-sized work boots may be subject to tripping hazards, cuts and abrasions may accrue due to blistering, and her toes may not be covered by the protective metal toe cap. Ill-fitting gloves pose one of the biggest dangers as over-sized gloves may cause a female worker to grasp a tool tighter than she should in order to get a good grip. Ill-fitting gloves also cause a great number of errors and difficulty in performing tasks requiring fine, detailed movements. And, as with all loose clothing, poor-fitting gloves may get caught in equipment, with horrible consequences. Goggles and masks are two other types of PPE that might not fit female workers properly. If goggles don't fit right, debris and other materials may get past them and cause injury to the eyes. And a mask that doesn't fit properly may provide little or no protection against airborne hazards.

## EXAMPLE

A woman working as part as a tree trimming team was using a chain saw to cut limbs from a large oak tree. Aware of the risk of saw dust she grabbed the only remaining pair of goggles from the work truck. The elastic was stretched from being worn on a much larger head and the width of the frame of the goggles was much larger than the width of her face. While cutting down a limb, a sizable shard of wood found its way through the gap between the frame of the goggles and her face and punctured her eye. It required surgery to remove.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Be vocal and assertive about your PPE needs. Patience and acceptance are virtues that have no place in the face of obvious danger. Voice your concerns about your PPE to your employer or supervisor, joint health and safety committee, or health and safety representative.
- Support your co-workers who are assertive about their PPE needs.
- Be proactive by knowing your size requirements in all PPE you need to wear and inform your employer of your size.
- Report all hazards, including poor-fitting PPE or PPE that is damaged or worn.
- Use your right to refuse work if the work is dangerous given the ill-fitting PPE provided.

## FINAL WORD

Many manufacturers are reluctant to invest in the research and development to produce correctly sized and proportioned products for women. Ill-fitting protective equipment jeopardizes the health and safety of female workers and their co-workers. Even when providing PPE designed specifically for each sex, employers must be sure to accommodate differences in body types. Ill-fitting PPE does not protect at all and using it is risky. Work with your co-workers and with your company to engage these issues. The construction industry workforce is very diverse and people come in different shapes and sizes, but everyone should be able to find safety products that fit comfortably and keep people safe.

## Ill fitting PPE

Job Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions:

1. A small men's size is a size fit for a woman.

True False

2. Fitting issues are the least of all safety worries.

True False

3. Customized PPE alterations offer a permissible solution for an ill-fitting item.

True False

4. A company is liable for incidents that result due to a failure to provide adequate PPE for workers.

True False

### Meeting Attended By:

Please print name here.

Initial here.

Please print name here.	Initial here.

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_