



Toolbox Talks

Spotlight on Safety



Personal Protective Equipment – An Overview

Hazards exist in every workplace in many different forms: sharp edges, falling objects, flying sparks, chemicals, noise and many other potentially dangerous situations. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires that employers protect their employees from workplace hazards that can cause injury.

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 employees in order to minimize their exposure to a variety of hazards. Examples of PPE include such items as gloves, special footwear, eye protection (safety glasses, goggles, face shields) protective hearing devices (earplugs, earmuffs) hard hats, respirators and full body suits.

Specifically, employers are responsible for:

- performing a “hazard assessment” of the workplace to identify and control physical and health hazards;
- identifying and providing appropriate PPE for employees;
- training employees in the use and care of the PPE;
- maintaining PPE, including replacing worn or damaged PPE; and
- periodically reviewing, updating and evaluating the effectiveness of the PPE program.



Photo by Kevin Rosseel.

So what are your responsibilities? When you started work for your company, you were most likely handed a hard hat, a pair of earplugs, safety glasses, etc. Do you know what they are for and how they work? Before you proceed to use any type of personal protective equipment, you should know when it should be used, how to use it and how to maintain it. So, pay attention to the training that you receive and don't hesitate to ask questions. Here are the important questions you should ask and have answered:

- Why is PPE necessary?
- How will it protect you?
- When are you expected to wear/use it?
- How do you adjust it to fit you properly?
- How you should clean and/or disinfect it?
- Where and how should you store it?
- What should you do if it gets damaged or lost?

To assist both employers and employees, NUCA makes available to members a number of Toolbox Talks that focus on PPE that protects different parts of the body. They are:

- Hand Protection/Protección de Manos,
- Head Protection/Protección de Cabeza,
- Eye and Face Protection/Protección de Ojo y Cara,
- Hearing Protection/La Protección Auditiva, and
- Foot Protection/Protección de Pie.

These additional handouts and company training should provide the basic answers you need.

Copyright©2008 by the National Utility Contractors Association—All rights reserved.

Disclaimer: This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. However, the information in this toolbox talk is provided without any representation or warranty, express or implied, regarding its accuracy or correctness.