



PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Personal Protective Equipment?

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is anything used or worn by a person to minimise risk to the person's health or safety and includes a wide range of clothing and safety equipment. PPE includes boots, face masks, hard hats, ear plugs, respirators, gloves, safety harnesses and high visibility clothing.

When can PPE be used?

PPE is one of the least effective ways of controlling risks to work health and safety and should only be used:

- when there are no other practical control measures available (as a last resort)
- as an interim measure until a more effective way of controlling the risk can be used, or
- to supplement higher level control measures (as a back-up).

When should persons conducting a business or undertaking provide PPE?

If PPE is required, the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) who is directing the work must provide PPE to workers at the workplace, unless it has been provided by another PCBU. This will usually be the person's employer but could also be, for example, a main contractor at the workplace.

It is an offence for a PCBU to charge or levy a worker for PPE, or cause a worker to be charged. Workplace relations laws also prohibit deductions from employee's wages for work-related items such as PPE.

Can PCBUs provide a PPE allowance instead of purchasing the required PPE?

Yes. PCBUs can provide a PPE allowance, providing the allowance covers the cost of the PPE required under work health and safety laws. You also need to ensure that any PPE purchased by the worker meets the minimum standards required by work health and safety laws.

Do PCBUs need to cover the cost of uniforms or regular shoes?

No. PCBUs do not need to pay for uniforms, shoes or clothing that is generally considered not to be PPE. This includes workers' regular clothing such as pants or jeans that are worn in a factory environment.

The requirements to provide and pay for clothing and other equipment under the work health and safety laws only applies to items that are PPE.

Do PCBUs need to provide PPE to work experience students (including university students)?

Students placed with PCBUs for purposes of gaining work experience are not 'workers' for purposes of the work health and safety laws so requirements to provide them with, and pay for, PPE do not apply in these circumstances.

PCBUs still owe these students work health and safety duties as 'other persons' at the workplace and must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that proper PPE is worn or used as necessary.

Some students however, particularly those on longer-term placements, may be carrying out work and would be considered to be workers for purposes of the work health and safety laws. This means the duty to provide

and pay for PPE applies. Arrangements for payment could be organised between the organisation placing the students in work and the relevant PCBU.

What standard of PPE is required?

PPE used at a workplace must be:

- selected to minimise risk to work health and safety
- suitable for the nature of the work and any hazard associated with the work
- a suitable size and fit and reasonably comfortable for the person wearing it
- maintained, repaired or replaced so it continues to minimise the worker's health and safety risk, and
- used or worn by the worker, so far as is reasonably practicable.

How do I choose the right PPE for the job?

Selection processes for choosing the right PPE must involve consultation with workers and their representatives and should also include:

- a detailed evaluation of the risk and performance requirements for the PPE
- compatibility of PPE items where more than one type of PPE is required (for example ear muffs with a hard hat)
- consultation with the supplier to ensure PPE is suitable for the work and workplace conditions, and
- preference for PPE that complies with the relevant Australian Standard or equivalent standard.

What is the role of the PCBU when using PPE?

PCBUs should ensure:

- PPE is used properly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
- PPE fits correctly and is reasonably comfortable for the worker who is to use or wear it
- PPE does not interfere with any medical conditions of the worker using the PPE

- workers are instructed and trained in how to use, maintain and store the PPE
- appropriate signs are used to remind workers where PPE must be worn, and
- periodic assessments are carried out to ensure PPE is used properly and is effective.

What are the maintenance requirements for PPE?

PPE must be maintained, repaired or replaced so it continues to minimise the risk to the worker who uses it. This includes ensuring the equipment is:

- clean and hygienic, and
- in good working order.

The PPE must be maintained to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that it is used for work by the worker.

What are the problems with using PPE?

Where PPE is provided and used at work, you should remember that:

- wearing PPE may adversely affect the performance of tasks being undertaken (for example restricting vision or mobility)
- PPE may be uncomfortable to wear and some workers may not be able to wear it (for example, workers who are allergic to latex cannot wear rubber gloves)
- ongoing supervision is required to ensure the PPE is being used correctly, and
- PPE may create new hazards (for example, some items of PPE can hinder the body's natural cooling mechanisms by preventing evaporation of perspiration).

What is the worker's duty in relation to PPE?

A worker who is provided with PPE by their PCBU must:

- use or wear the PPE in accordance with any information, training or reasonable instruction provided by the PCBU, so far as they are reasonably able

- not intentionally misuse or damage the PPE, and
- advise the PCBU of any damage, defect or need to clean or decontaminate any of the PPE they are aware of.

If the PPE is uncomfortable or does not fit properly, the worker should consult with their manager.

If a worker refuses to wear or use the PPE, the PCBU can take action against the worker. Action may also be taken if a worker intentionally misuses or damages the PPE.

Do people at a workplace, other than the work need to use PPE?

A person other than a worker must wear the PPE at the workplace in accordance with any information, training or reasonable instruction provided by the business or undertaking.

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