

SAFETY WINS WITH PPE COMPLIANCE

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act) requires any employer to maintain a safe work environment that is without risk to their workers. Also, companies must provide and maintain all the equipment and systems that are necessary for staff to do the work, in a condition that will not affect the health and safety of workers. Before Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is issued, it is the employers responsibility to remove or reduce any potential danger to the health and safety of the employee.

When it comes to PPE, one of the key challenges faced by employers is their employees not making proper use of the apparel supplied. The reasons for this vary from poor fitting garments to protective clothing which is impractical and hinder productive labour. For instance, in a mining environment that experiences extreme temperatures, workers will disregard their protective gear in favour of comfort – placing themselves and the organisation at risk.

Says Business Unit Manager of Innovative PPE Solutions, a subsidiary of Innovative Solutions Group™, Anton Zwanepoel, "Safety officers are responsible for choosing the most appropriate garments for the job at hand. Any expert help offered must assist the company in meeting the safety requirements for protective equipment, and ensure employers and their employees enjoy peace of mind in respect of the OHS Act."

To lessen this threat and ensure employee compliance, some of the factors which should be taken into account when selecting protective wear are as follows:

1. Proper Fit

Does the garment allow the wearer to perform the job function without difficulty? Does it allow a full range of motion without binding or risk of tearing?

When it comes to selecting protective apparel, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. A garment that is too large is as unacceptable as one that is too small. It is important for employees to try on the garments to ensure a good fit and full range of motion.

2. Flexibility and Weight

Weight and flexibility are important in protective clothing because they affect the wearer's range of motion and extent of job fatigue. While lightweight, limited-use protective apparel offers obvious advantages over recyclable garments, lightweight fabrics must also be strong enough to withstand the rigours of the workplace.

3. Comfort and Heat Stress

Will the wearer find the garment comfortable in all seasons? Does the garment allow enough air flow to prevent heat stress?

To an employee, the aesthetic comfort of a protective garment can be as important as its physiological comfort. Although both affect the usability of the clothing, it is important to remember to never sacrifice the protective barrier for comfort. By its very nature, protective clothing can be an added barrier to natural cooling and more so in hot, humid situations. This is important to bear in mind, when selecting the protective gear given to the employee.

4. Proper Garment Design

Ensuring that protective apparel is designed and made from the right materials may be the most important of all wearability issues. By giving employees apparel that provides protection and good-wear quality features, employers will encourage their workers to make use of their safety wardrobe and achieve a higher level of personal protection.

Health and Safety non-compliance penalties vary – the Department of Labour can order corrective measures with a warning or slight fine. However, non-compliance could also result in the shutting down of premises or jail time served by the company owners.

“This legislation is closely monitored, which is a good thing. After all, no company wants accidents or fatalities at their sites and it is their duty as responsible corporate citizens to look after the wellbeing of their staff.

“We continually assess our workwear to ensure we offer the best solution for our clients and the men and women who wear them. We want employees to be able to keep their safety gear on and feel they can work comfortably doing so, shielding themselves and their organisations,” concludes Zwanepoel.